CHAPTER 1

"Nibbled to Death by Ducks"

RONALD REAGAN INSISTED THAT IT WASN'T HIS FAULT.

In July of 1976, Jimmy Carter emerged from the Democratic National Convention ahead in the polls against President Gerald Ford by a record thirty-three percentage points. By November, Ford had staged a monumental comeback. But it was not monumental enough. Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States with 50.08 percent of the popular vote, and 55 percent of the electoral college.

What had stopped Ford just shy of the prize? In newspaper columns, radio commentaries, and interviews all through the rest of 1976 and into 1977, Reagan blamed factors like the Democrat-controlled Congress, for allegedly holding back matching funds owed to Ford's campaign. And *All the President's Men*, the hit Watergate movie from the spring, which Warner Bros. had rebooked into six hundred theaters two weeks before the election, for reminding voters of the incumbent's unpopular act of pardoning Richard Nixon after Watergate. And even the United Auto Workers, for calling a strike that autumn against the Ford Motor Company—sabotaging the economy to boost Jimmy Carter, Reagan claimed.

Ronald Reagan blamed everyone and everything, that is, except the factor many commentators said was *most* responsible for the ticket's defeat: Ronald Reagan.

He had challenged Ford for the nomination all the way through the convention, something unprecedented in the history of the Republican Party. Then, critics charged, he sat on his hands rather than seriously campaign for the ticket in the fall. If Ford had pulled in but 64,510 more votes in Texas and 7,232 more in Mississippi, he would have won the electoral college; or 137,984 more in Kentucky and West Virginia plus 35,473 from Missouri; or if he had won Ohio, where he came but 5,559 short, while adding either Louisiana, Alabama, or Mississippi, which Ford lost by less than two points—all of these states where Reagan had droves of passionate fans. But according to one top Republican operative, "the only effective campaign work done by Reagan was for Carter, whose ads featured Reagan's primary attacks against Ford." "Former Gov. Ronald

Reagan has succeeded in running out the election campaign without being drawn into full, direct support for President Ford," the *New York Times* had concluded—in order, the cognoscenti whispered, to preserve his own chances for 1980 should Gerald Ford lose.

Reagan howled his defense: "No defeated candidate for the nomination has ever campaigned that hard for the nominee," but there had been "a curtain of silence around my activities." This was not true. They were covered widely—under headlines like "Reagan Shuns Role in Ford's Campaign."

Now they said his political career was over. The *Boston Globe*'s Washington columnist joked that Richard Nixon was a more likely presidential prospect in 1980. About Reagan, the *Times* said, "At 65, he is considered by some as too old to make another run for the presidency." Even right-wingers agreed—scouring the horizon, one columnist noted, "for a bright, tough young conservative whom Reagan might groom for the GOP nomination in 1980." The *Times* also said that "political professionals of both major parties" believed the GOP was "closer to extinction than ever before in its 122-year history": they controlled only twelve governorships, and, according to Ford's pollster Robert Teeter, the loyalty of only 18 percent of American voters. Clearly, the Newspaper of Record concluded, "if the Republican Party is to rebuild it must entrust its future to younger men."

And less conservative ones. John Rhodes, the House minority leader, was a disciple of conservative hero Barry Goldwater. His tiny caucus of 143 would face a wall of 292 Democrats when the 95th Congress convened in January. After the election, he rued that "we give the impression of not caring, the worst possible image a political party can have." The American Conservative Union, chartered in 1964 to keep the faith after Goldwater's presidential loss that year as the Republican nominee, felt so unwelcome in the party that they met in Chicago the weekend after the election to consider chartering a new one. Reagan himself entertained the idea until one of his biggest donors threatened to cut him off if he persisted—though Reagan did suggest that perhaps a name change for the Grand Old Party was in order. "You know, in the business I used to be in, we discovered that very often the title of a picture was very important as to whether people went to see it or not." Even so, he had no suggestion what that should be.

THE DEMOCRATS, ON THE OTHER HAND, APPEARED TO BE IN CLOVER. AFTER Watergate, America longed for redemption. They met Jimmy Carter and fell in love.

One day that summer, the advertising man hired to make Gerald Ford's TV commercials turned on the radio. Jimmy Carter's mother, who'd joined the Peace Corps ten years earlier at the age of sixty-eight and whom an adoring nation called "Miz Lillian," dialed in to a sports talk show to gab about her favorite professional wrestlers. "I was spellbound," Malcolm MacDougall wrote. "One little phone call and 100,000 avid Boston sports fans had undoubtedly fallen in love with Jimmy Carter's mother."

He flipped on the TV. A Washington socialite was being interviewed by Johnny Carson. "She didn't want to talk about her new book. She wanted to talk about her trip to Plains, Georgia. In the beginning she wasn't a believer, she said. No, sir. She had been just as cynical as a lot of us liberals. But she'd talked with Jimmy Carter for hours. Just sat there on the porch, the two of them, talking about life and government and religion. And now she was a believer. Jimmy Carter was real, she said. . . . 'He is going to save our country. He is going to make us all better people.'"

MacDougall traveled to Boston's Logan Airport to fly to the Republican convention. At the newsstand, "Jimmy Carter's face was staring at me from dozens of magazines." And from the covers of paperback books with titles like *The Miracle of Jimmy Carter*. He turned around: "A stack of T-shirts with peanuts on the front, and the words 'THE GRIN WILL WIN.' This wasn't a clothing store."

Even so, 70 percent of the electorate told pollsters they had no intention of voting in November at all. One of them, a rabbi, wrote a *New York Times* op-ed. "I was one of the millions who rejected Barry Goldwater's foreign policy, voted for Lyndon Baines Johnson, and then got Mr. Goldwater's foreign policy anyway. I, too, voted for law and order and got Richard M. Nixon and Spiro T. Agnew. And now I think of the man who promised Congress that he would not interfere with the judicial process, and then pardoned Mr. Nixon as almost his first official act." So: no more voting. "If Pericles were alive today, he might be inclined to join me."

The epidemic of political apathy spread particularly thick among the young. During the insurgent 1960s, the notion of universities as a seedbed of idealism was accepted as a political truism for all time. No longer. A university provost explained that he was seeing "a new breed of student who is thinking more about jobs, money, and the future"—just not *society's* future. College business courses were oversubscribed. But politics? "Watergate taught them not to care," a high school civics teacher rued. A college professor gave a speech to his daughter's high school class, rhapsodizing about the excitement of the Kennedy years. "A few minutes into my talk I realized we weren't even on the same planet." He asked if they would protest if America began bombing Vietnam again. "Nothing. In desperation, I said: 'For God's sake, what *would* outrage you?' After a pause, a girl in a cheerleading uniform raised her hand and said tentatively, 'Well, I'd be pretty mad if they bombed this *school*.' "

JIMMY CARTER KICKED OFF HIS GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN WARM Springs, Georgia, on the front porch of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Winter White House." Democrats traditionally opened on Labor Day in Detroit's Cadillac Square. But Detroit was in the middle of a crime spree. Cadillac Square was only blocks from the Cobo Hall arena, where, the UPI reported, "gangs of black youth," taking advantage of the fact that the cash-strapped city had been forced to lay off nearly a thousand cops, had recently set upon a rock concert, robbing, beating, and raping attendees.

So: Warm Springs it was.

Two of Roosevelt's sons were by Carter's side. A seventy-three-year-old Black man, subject of a famous *Life* magazine picture showing him playing accordion in his Navy uniform as Roosevelt's funeral train trundled by, performed the New Deal anthem "Happy Days Are Here Again." The Roosevelt connection marked Carter as an heir to the Democrats' glorious liberal past. The Georgia setting invoked his Southern identity; if elected he would be the first president from the Deep South since Zachary Taylor in 1848. Featuring an African American spoke to his proud identity as a post-racist Southerner. Jimmy Carter would be the candidate for everyone. In his speech, he feinted left, comparing Ford to Herbert Hoover—another "decent and well-intentioned man who sincerely believed that government could not or should not with bold action attack the terrible economic and social ills of our nation." He feinted right: "When there is a choice between government responsibility and private responsibility, we should always go with private responsibility. . . . When there is a choice between welfare and work, let's go to work." Then—and most importantly—he staked his claim as the candidate unconnected to the corrupt legacy of Richard Nixon: "I owe the special interests nothing. I owe the people everything."

Ford opened at the White House, signing a series of bills before the cameras. What bills? It didn't matter. "We agreed," Mal MacDougall later explained, "there were no issues strong enough to decide the election." *Symbolism* mattered: a trustworthy man was now in charge.

"*Trust*," Gerald Ford said, jabbing at his opponent at his first campaign rally a week later, in the basketball arena of his alma mater, the University of Michigan, "is not cleverly shading words so that each separate audience can hear what it wants to hear, but saying *plainly* and *simply* what you mean."

He received an enthusiastic volley of applause.

"Not having to guess what a cand—"

A sound like a gunshot rang out. The president, who had suffered two assassination attempts the previous September, flinched—then, realizing that it was a firecracker, continued on as if nothing had happened. The applause swelled and swelled until the entire crowd was up on its feet, as if in heartfelt gratitude at watching a political leader *not* being assassinated. The incident exemplified Ford's campaign theme: he had returned the United States to normalcy.

Americans no longer had a political leader who was lying to their face. They were no longer losing a morally corroding war. Arab oil sheiks were no longer holding the economy hostage. And maybe, just maybe, the awful everyday traumas of the 1960s and 1970s might finally be *over*. "*I'm feeling good about America!*" Ford's jingle bouncily intoned, in commercials that signposted his un-flashy ordinariness.

Jimmy Carter's commercials sounded the same notes. They told the story of a man who had learned self-sufficiency and the value of hard work farming the same Georgia soil his family had since the eighteenth century, soil he sifted earnestly, wearing jeans and a plain flannel work shirt. His wife, Rosalynn, said, "Jimmy is honest, unselfish, and truly concerned about the country. I think he'll be a great president." That presidential candidates were decent people had been "obvious until Watergate," a historian of campaign advertising observed. "Only in 1976 can a claim that a candidate is honest, unselfish, hard-working and concerned about the country warrant the conclusion that he will be a great president."

THIS, HOWEVER, PRODUCED A PARADOX: THE CAMPAIGNS' EAGERNESS TO prove their man the most sincere produced quantum leaps in artifice.

Carter's packagers were ahead in this game. In 1972, Atlanta adman Gerald Rafshoon suggested that a future Carter presidential campaign could capitalize on Carter's "Kennedy smile"; Carter, impressed, hired him. In 1974, Carter researchers learned audiences responded best to key words and phrases like "not from Washington," "competence," and "integrity"; those became Rafshoon's palette. The peanut emerged early as a key symbol; it projected humility—an advantage, a strategist explained, since "humility was not our long suit." On the trail in 1976, Carter carried his own garment bag onto the campaign plane, and posed for "candid" wire-service photos washing his socks in a hotel sink. Carter's eight-year-old daughter was put up front for the cameras; by that summer, with what felt like half the country's political journalists camped out in Plains, population 632, there was hardly a United States citizen who didn't know that Amy charged ten cents a glass at her lemonade stand. (The couple's three adult children, less photogenic, barely appeared.)

A former news producer named Barry Jagoda was Carter's media wizard. He boasted that because he came from that world, not advertising, he was better at manipulating TV news—"the most critical battlefield in media politics." For instance, on the day of the crucial Wisconsin primary, while the rest of the candidates remained behind for victory or concession speeches, Jagoda flew Carter to New York so that he could react to the returns live on a network news set. "This kind of media politics is seamless," he explained. "It doesn't mimic the news or play off the news. It is the news." (The interview in which Jagoda said this was another novel feature of the 1976 campaign: image-makers publicly *explaining* how they made artifice look real.)

Marketing sincerity was the particular specialty of the advisor Carter admired most. Twenty-eight-year-old Patrick Caddell had been a mere seventeen when he first got into the business of political polling. He was an Irish-Catholic Massachusetts native whose family moved to Florida's Panhandle—Dixie, culturally speaking. In 1968, for a math project, the high school senior besotted with baseball statistics and the late President Kennedy went door to door in a working-class Jacksonville neighborhood to poll residents about the upcoming presidential contest, and was struck by the insight that animated his career. He was shocked to hear, again and again: "Wallace or Kennedy, either one." Ideologically, that made little sense; during the Kennedy administration, the segregationist Governor George C. Wallace and the anti-segregationist Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy had been sworn enemies. When Caddell asked people to explain, they gave answers like "They're tough guys" and "You can believe them"; ideology seemed the last thing on their minds. While an undergraduate at Harvard University, Caddell opened a polling business out of his dorm room, and began devising innovative methods that built on this insight: tools for inquiring instead how the candidate made voters *feel*.

Americans' dominant feeling, he concluded, was *alienation*. He devised tools to measure it—"trust indices," "ladders of confidence"—and, from the results, language and symbols that his clients could deploy to convey to voters how they could *salve* that alienation. George McGovern hired Caddell as chief pollster for his presidential campaign in 1972, when Caddell was still at Harvard. McGovern lost soundly. But another Caddell client, twenty-nine-year-old Joseph Biden, won a senate seat after Caddell coached him not to criticize his incumbent opponent—that just made him another *politician*—but "Washington." That made him an "*anti*-politician"—the kind Caddell preferred: candidates who spoke to what he termed the electorate's "malaise," and what he began calling in 1974 America's "crisis of confidence."

Candidates, in other words, like Jimmy Carter. Caddell was instrumental in Carter's most important political breakthrough: trouncing George Wallace in the Florida Democratic primary. He first positioned Carter, Wallace-style, as alien to Washington; then Carter cemented the loyalty of Wallace fans by playing to Southerners' ancient longing to *really* stick it to the Yankees. George Wallace's longtime slogan was "Send them a message." Carter's was "This time, don't send them a message. Send them a president." "He is a generation ahead of most other technicians," a Ford campaign memo worried on the cusp of the general election. "No one has yet devised a system for protecting a GOP incumbent from the Caddell-style alienation attack."

FORD ADMAN MALCOLM MACDOUGALL WAS CALLED TO THE WHITE HOUSE for his first briefing for the fall campaign by a man they identified to him only as "Mr. Cheney," whose office, MacDougall observed, had a safe as big as a man "that had a big sign across it saying 'LOCKED.'"

Pollster Robert Teeter described his recent innovation, a polling instrument that measured how warmly voters felt at the mention of a candidate's name—a "feelings thermometer." Ford's temperature was forty-five: "Lukewarm." Carter's was twenty degrees higher. "*We* may fear that he's another Nixon—a cold, calculating son of a bitch without a nonpolitical friend in the world. But this"—he pointed to the chart—"is reality. *This* is the Carter we have to deal with."

Then he unveiled another innovation: the "perceptual map." He laid down a transparent acetate sheet with scattered dots printed thereupon; with a dramatic flourish, he layered another on top, then another, then another. Each point represented a surveyed voter; each sheet, a different voter bloc. "Thousands of little dots began to cluster around Jimmy Carter. Blue-collar workers started clinging to the Carter circle. Intellectuals gathered around him. Catholics and Jews . . . Blacks and Chicanos smothered him with their dots. People who cared about busing dropped at his feet. People who were for gun control sided with him as well. Conservative women kissed his feet. Liberal women hugged his head. Environmentalists swarmed around him. The rich touched him. The poor clung to him."

Their job, Teeter explained, was to wrench that geometry of pleasant associations from the opposing candidate to their own—by piling up proofs of their candidate's trustworthiness, even as Carter's side worked to turn Ford into the reanimated political corpse of Richard M. Nixon.

FBI director Clarence Kelley was revealed to have availed himself of $335 worth of home improvements from the FBI's carpentry shop, and Ford appeared to be doing nothing about it. Said Carter, "When people throughout the country, particularly young people, see Richard Nixon cheating, lying, and leaving the highest office in disgrace, when they see the previous attorney general violating the law and admitting it, when you see the head of the FBI break a little law and stay there, it gives everybody the sense that crime must be okay. 'If the big shots in Washington can get away with it, well, so can I.' . . . The director of the FBI ought to be purer than Caesar's wife." Bob Dole, Ford's hatchet-man running mate, gave the campaign's response. He asked how Carter could claim to be for closing tax loopholes and balancing the budget given his own "nice little savings" of $41,702 on his 1975 taxes via a credit for equipment purchased for his peanut warehouse. Then Dole was confronted with questions about a $5,000 campaign contribution he had taken from the lobbyist in charge of Gulf Oil's illegal slush fund.

Peccadilloes were being elevated to blockbuster news status. After Watergate, journalists were frantic to expose corruption. Of a TV commercial intended to convey Carter's untutored authenticity, the *New York Times* reported, "The body attached to the hand, which is never visible on the screen, belonged not to a newsman but to Gerald Rafshoon, the Atlanta advertising man who designs Mr. Carter's ads." On the president's strategy of campaigning via Rose Garden photo opportunities, they described aides placing a fiberglass mat on the White House lawn before staging a "spontaneous" presidential stroll—then, "an hour later, the desk, chair, and mat had been moved and the television cameras repositioned so that Mr. and Mrs. Ford could be filmed striding into the garden from a different door"; the photograph was captioned, "President Ford shaking hands with his wife, Betty, in the Rose Garden . . . and doing it again for photographers who asked for a better angle." This ceaseless questing after transparency seemed to freeze the electorate in a state of confusion, and by the third week of September, one-third of voters told pollsters they had no idea which candidate they would choose, with 40 percent saying they would not vote at all.

PUNDITS HOPED THE TRIVIALITY WOULD ABATE ONCE AND FOR ALL AFTER September 23, when the first televised presidential debate since Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy locked horns in 1960 took place.

The first person ever to propose televised presidential debates was that most high-minded of presidential aspirants, Adlai Stevenson, disgusted by the development of electioneering via "the jingle, the spot announcement, and the animated cartoon," and the prospect of yet one more year spent reciting the same canned speech in town after town in 1956. His advisors talked him out of the idea. He proposed it again for 1960 after his own political retirement: "Imagine discussion on the great issues of our time with the whole country watching." It would "transform our circus-atmosphere presidential campaigning into a great debate conducted in full view of all the people."

Federal statute, however, stood in the way: Section 315 of the 1934 Federal Communications Act mandated that broadcasters grant "equal time" for *every* announced presidential candidate, even if there were dozens. Kennedy and Nixon got around this in 1960 by having Congress vote a temporary suspension of Section 315. Subsequent incumbents, disinclined to grant their challengers equal TV billing, had their congressional allies block that option. Then keen legal minds devised a loophole: if an *independent entity*, like the League of Women Voters, staged debates, then the networks could cover them as "news events." So it was, for the first time in sixteen years, that the American public would at last be treated to a reprise of what Theodore White, in *The Making of the President 1960*, had called a "simultaneous gathering of all the tribes of America to ponder their choice between two chieftains in the largest political convocation in the history of man." The presidential election could finally become a contest of ideas.

Then two men set themselves down behind lecterns in a venerable Philadelphia theater—a TV stage set, actually: the panel of questioners sat in front of a wall that blocked the audience's view of the stage, and the audience was ordered not to make a sound. The producer boasted of creating a "completely controlled environment." Outside, police penned off an equally controlled area for demonstrators. The most cacophonous protested abortion. Carter had had his first run-in with the issue shortly after the convention, in a meeting with Catholic bishops in New York. The candidate pandered to them by disavowing a plank in his party's platform opposing a constitutional amendment overturning the *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, promising he would not stand in the way of such an amendment. But the bishops were not satisfied; they demanded he *advocate* for such an amendment. "No one told him," the director of communications for the New York City archdiocese later remarked, "the bishops were talking of abortion as Auschwitz. Compromise was and is impossible for them." The next month, Carter was banned from speaking in a Catholic church. In Scranton, Pennsylvania, Secret Service officers had to hustle him away from an anti-abortion mob. But the issue went undiscussed at the debate; both candidates' positions were virtually identical: personally opposed; leave the question to the states.

Indeed, many of the most interesting issues went undiscussed. Questioning emphasized technical, bureaucratic concerns. The first exciting moments came when a producer broke a rule against showing reaction shots: Carter's face turned sour after Ford called him a hypocrite; Ford glowered when Carter accused him of public relations stunts. "Lousy television," the media guru Marshall McLuhan thought.

Until there arrived one of the most astonishing twenty-eight minutes in the history of TV.

Elizabeth Drew of the *New Yorker* asked the evening's final question, about Congress's eye-opening 1975 investigations of abuses by America's intelligence agencies, including assassinations of foreign leaders: "What do you think about trying to write in some new protections by getting new laws to govern these agencies?" The president, in his dullest Midwestern drone, insisted that his executive reorganizations and new wiretapping rules took care of the problem. "And I'm glad that we have a good director in George Bush, we *have* good executive orders, and the CIA, and the DIA, and NASA—I mean the NSA—are now doing a good job under proper supervision . . ."

He pursed his lips. He sounded nervous. This was a dodgy, almost Nixonian answer. Things were getting interesting. Carter had spoken frankly and harshly on the campaign trail about the abuses of intelligence agencies. Now, with gathering intensity, he began lecturing: "One of the *very serious* things that has happened in our government in recent years, and has continued up until now, is a *breakdown* in the *trust* among our people in the—"

Silence. Even though his lips were moving.

A harsh electronic buzz.

The sonorous, authoritative voice of NBC anchorman David Brinkley: "The pool broadcasters in Philadelphia have lost the audio. It's not a conspiracy against Governor Carter or President Ford . . . they will fix it as soon as possible."

For hadn't American know-how always fixed everything? Hadn't it beat Hitler, delivered the world its first mass middle class, rebuilt Europe, put a man on the Moon, fought a war on poverty? It had, once upon a time. Once upon a time, the voices of such authoritative gray-haired white men reassured us, soothed us, guided us through the trauma of assassination and riot and Watergate and war, explained the inexplicable to us.

Not now.

The sound of a phone dialing. Carter gesticulating silently onscreen. David Brinkley breaking in, explaining nothing, again.

The scene shifted to backstage: "David, we don't know what is happening, we're as surprised as you are, uh, they were talking and suddenly they quit"; the backstage correspondent then tried convincing the 53.6 percent of American households that were tuning in that the debate had been "very lively." He stuck microphones in the faces of campaign representatives, each dubiously claiming their men had scored knockout blows, that everything was going just smashingly (". . . but I think the real winner tonight was the American people . . ."). An interviewer pronounced with a hint of triumph in his voice, "And now back to David Brinkley!"

Who, not realizing he was on the air, said nothing, then cast a glance offstage, mumbling, "I gather the debate is over, is that right?"

Then to the camera, conclusively: "So the debate is over! That's it."

But neither man moved. So the cameras kept filming . . . nothing.

It took the length of a TV situation comedy before the gremlin was finally fixed. It was announced that Jimmy Carter would continue answering where he left off. He said, "There has been too much government secrecy and not enough respect for the privacy of American citizens," then grinned. The two men made closing statements. The ordeal ended. Eugene McCarthy, the former senator from Minnesota who was running a quixotic third-party bid but whose lawsuit to be included in the debate had failed, was asked what he thought about the interruption. He deadpanned, "I never noticed." F. Clifton White, the political organizer most responsible for Barry Goldwater's presidential nomination in 1964 and who was working unenthusiastically for Ford, was amazed at the sight of these "two men who were seeking to hold the most powerful office in the world . . . speechless at their podia like waxworks dummies, afraid to open their mouths and take charge," and observed that if one or the other had done so, they would have won the election right then and there.

But the candidates had been trained by their handlers—trained within an inch of their lives—that one could only *lose* a televised debate, so they should not try anything, anything at all, that risked a mistake; they had been drilled not to sit down, or make any motion that might suggest weakness; indeed, it had required the intervention of a kindly stage manager just for the two men to wipe their sweaty brows during the interruption, because they would only do so when the cameras turned away. Some contest of ideas.

THE CONSERVATIVE WEEKLY *HUMAN EVENTS* BEGAN RUNNING ADS: "CONSERVATIVES You still have a choice, you can WRITE IN REAGAN." Reagan got letters from adoring fans asking him why they shouldn't. He always responded by pointing to the party platform—"written by people who support me . . . based on the positions I took during the campaign. . . . If Republican victory does occur based on our platform (and it is our conservative platform) then we can continue to build from there." He also said that if Ford should lose, it would be time to "reassess our party and lay plans to bring together the new majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents who are looking for a banner around which to rally."

The name he wished to see on that banner was clearly his own. Ronald

Reagan had succeeded in turning his fight against a sitting president at the Republican convention into a nail-biter—then, on the last night, delivered an apparently impromptu speech that received more acclaim than the nominee's, leaving many delegates in rapturous tears. Four days later he returned to the job he'd done after retiring from the California governor's office: a five-minute daily political broadcast syndicated on hundreds of radio stations. One of the commentaries he recorded that day blamed "machine politics" in states where he had lost primaries to Ford—suggesting Ford was a corrupt political boss. He was asked in a press conference on the sidewalk outside the studio where he recorded his broadcasts, on the corner of Hollywood and Vine, about the buzz to form a conservative third party. He answered, "The Republican Party, down to less than 20 percent of the voting public, has got to reassess"—hardly a ringing endorsement of Gerald Ford.

Ford phoned Reagan, asking him angrily if he even cared about beating Jimmy Carter. The *New York Times* said the Reagans declined an invitation to spend the night at the White House. Ford's running mate was asked if Reagan was snubbing them. "I don't see any problem with Governor Reagan," Bob Dole replied—but then Reagan's longtime press secretary Lyn Nofziger, who was working that fall for Dole's campaign, told the press, "It's hard for a lot of us to generate any enthusiasm."

What Reagan's fans *were* enthusiastic about, at party meetings convened to plot the general election attack, was punishing Ford loyalists from the primaries. The chairman of the California Republicans was a former Reagan protégé named Paul Haerle who had jumped ship. Conservatives wore "Hang Haerle" buttons, complete with nooses, to the state convention. Texas's "sounded like a convention of crickets": hundreds of "Reagan's Raiders" blew tiny whistles to sabotage proceedings to name a Ford man state chairman. Reagan's most loyal supporter in the Senate, Jesse Helms, endorsed the ticket—in a speech demanding that Ford's secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, embrace the party platform Reaganites had crafted or "resign immediately." That platform happened to include a plank, titled "Morality in Foreign Policy," which excoriated the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford program of détente with the Soviet Union. Conservatives' price for supporting Ford, in other words, was Kissinger avowing loyalty to a platform that called them both immoral.

Reagan was finally persuaded to deliver a televised endorsement. The speech said virtually nothing about Gerald Ford, but a great deal about Reagan's ambitions.

It was a quintessential Reagan performance, in every way the opposite of the bland president he was affecting to support. The elaborately dressed office set recalled the image with which many Americans still primarily associated him: hosting *General Electric Theater* on Sunday nights in

the 1950s and early 1960s. He opened with a twinkle in his eye, arguing that this election was *really* about the two parties' platforms. "There have been times in the past when party platforms were noted less for what they said than for what they avoided saying," he said. "But this year of our Bicentennial, we find the philosophies of our parties clearly stated and clearly visible for all to see."

("*Walk toward*," the teleprompter's stage directions read.)

"A party platform is an *actual guide* to the course a party will take if and when it comes to power."

("*Lean on chair.*")

"If that is true, then the 1976 platform of the Democrat Party charts the most dangerous course for a nation since the Egyptians tried a shortcut through the Red Sea."

("*Sit on desk.*")

He castigated the Democrats' endorsement of the bill cosponsored by Senator Hubert Humphrey and Congressman Augustus Hawkins, the African American representative of the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, to require the federal government to produce full employment, even if it had to create government jobs to do so—"so disastrous in its consequences to the national economy, that the Democratic leadership in the Congress dares not bring it up for a vote in this election year." Reagan claimed it cost as much as twenty-three stacks of $1,000 bills piled as high as a fifty-story building and would produce "complete and total control of the nation's economy from Washington."

("*Relax*," said the teleprompter. This was the sort of thing that tended to get Reagan's Irish up.)

He implied that Jimmy Carter had Hitlerian ambitions: "The great political temptation of our age is to believe that some charismatic leader, some party, some ideology or some improvement in technology can be substituted for an economy in which millions of individual human beings make their own decisions. . . . It only takes one man in power with the wrong ideas to ruin an economy, and a nation."

He flayed the Democrats' promise of universal health insurance, said their platform's energy plank would "economically cripple" the companies "that are the only hope we have for developing new sources and continuing to explore for oil," the education plank extracting "more money *from* you but less control *by* you"—while the Republican platform, which was "not handed down by party leadership" but "created out of a free and frank and open debate among rank-and-file members," understood "that *your* initiative and energy create jobs, our standard of living, and the underlying economic strength of the country," and that "no nation can spend its way into prosperity; a nation can only spend its way into bankruptcy."

Then he lit into the Democrats for proposing to cut $5 to $7 billion out of the defense budget: "There is simply no alternative to necessary spending on defense. We pay the necessary cost in terms of tax dollars now or in freedom and lives later on." He looked into the camera: "If you're with your children, take a look at them. They're very much involved in this decision. If the Democrats make a mistake in how much to spend for defense, *our children* will pay the ultimate price."

The next morning, the *New York Times* reported that, following failed negotiations between Reagan's advisor Michael Deaver and Dick Cheney, Reagan would not be speaking for Ford in the crucial states of Mississippi, South Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, and Kentucky, and that Cheney had received "a highly qualified answer" as to whether Reagan would cut commercials for Ford.

IN ANY EVENT, REAGAN WAS YESTERDAY'S NEWS. CAMPAIGN REPORTERS soon had something more entertaining to discuss.

That summer, Jimmy Carter had sat for several far-ranging interviews with a writer named Robert Scheer. He offered frank complaints about the numbness of campaign routine, and explained why he believed pardoning Vietnam draft evaders was civic duty; thoughtfully discussed why he refused to position himself simply in either the liberal or conservative camp despite media criticism that he was trying to be all things to all people; spoke candidly about his own moral failing in neglecting to speak against school desegregation until *Brown v. Board of Ed*, and in supporting the Vietnam War until 1971. He was blunt about America's failings, too, citing the CIA's abuses of power in particular; people had become inured to that sort of thing, he complained; some perhaps even "prefer lies to truth. But I don't think it's simplistic to say that our government hasn't measured up to the ethical and moral standards of the people in this country."

The subject turned to whether he'd ever discussed the possibility of assassination with his wife; Carter replied that he was not afraid to die, and that the reason was his religious faith; and whether liberal-minded Americans needed to fear the sort of judges a devout Southern Baptist president might appoint. This spurred a long, subtle theological discussion. There might never have been a document of a candidate's thinking quite this rich in the history of American electioneering. And if it had appeared in, say, a newsmagazine, that might have been how the interview was received. Instead, it appeared in the soft-core pornography magazine *Playboy*—and all anyone could think about was sex.

He was explaining why he wouldn't be "running around breaking down people's doors to see if they were fornicating." The answer, he said, lay within Christianity's conception of sin and redemption. "Christ said, 'I tell you that anyone who looks on a woman with lust has in his heart already committed adultery.' I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times. That is something that God recognizes I will do—and I have done it—and God forgives me for it. But that doesn't mean that I condemn someone who not only looks on a woman with lust but leaves his wife and shacks up with somebody out of wedlock."

"Fornicating," "adultery in my heart," "lust," "shacks up"—it was like he hadn't said anything else.

An advance text was circulated to journalists right around the time of the first debate. The Associated Press headed its dispatch with a warning: "You may find the material in this story offensive to the readers of family newspapers." Cartoonists naturally got in on the act: Carter, in a yokel's string tie, carrying binoculars, a Peeping Tom peeking from behind a pillar. South Carolina's Democratic senator Ernest "Fritz" Hollings said, "Let's hope that when he becomes president he quits talking about adultery." Georgia's Democratic chairman told reporters, "I've been everywhere today and the reaction is uniformly negative." Reverend Pat Robertson, the son of a senator, whose Johnny Carson–style Christian talk show *The 700 Club* reached 2.5 million viewers nationwide, said evangelicals were "making a serious reassessment of Carter."

After the complete *Playboy* issue came out—there was a spread on "Sex in Cinema 1976" featuring stills of carnal activity in no fewer than twenty-two films; the usual tasteless jokes and cartoons (guy leaving an orgy: "I don't know who to thank, but one or more of you gives great head!"); an editorial insisting heroin was not nearly so harmful as it was made out to be; a centerfold who described herself as "half liberal, half conservative" (not unlike the fellow whose interview Americans could finally read in full by flipping to page ninety-one, between a Scotch ad and an article praising Austin, Texas, as "the only wide-open dope-and-music resort available now that students were studying again")—and Ronald Reagan pronounced himself so disgusted leafing through it that he was too embarrassed to deposit it in a public garbage can.

A SECOND FRONT IN THE *PLAYBOY* CONTROVERSY OPENED IN TEXAS. FOR Carter had also said in the interview, "I don't think I would *ever* take on the same frame of mind that Nixon or Johnson did, lying, cheating, and distorting the truth." The insult to the honor of history's first Texan president portended a potential electoral college disaster.

Team Carter counted Southern states comprising 96 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win as in the bag, and that Democratic Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the District of Columbia would bring their total to 125. Their most important swing states were Florida and Texas, both of which had begun a halting and uneven shift to the Republicans they hoped to arrest, but with Carter's LBJ gaffe, Republicans spied an opportunity to lock in Texas for good.

The Ford campaign assigned the task of turning the molehill into a Texas-sized mountain to John Connally, the state's larger-than-life former governor, a Lyndon Johnson protégé who had switched parties after serving as Richard Nixon's treasury secretary. A skilled student of his state's traditions of populist demagoguery, Democratic National Committee chairman Robert Strauss, an old college running buddy of Connally's, said giving him the job was like handing Jascha Heifetz a Stradivarius. Connally got to work; and soon, the Texas tide began turning.

Rosalynn Carter raced down to apologize to Lady Bird Johnson. Her husband made an emergency campaign trip. Hounded by reporters, he fudged that "after the interview, there was a *summary* made that unfortunately equated what I had said about President Johnson and President Nixon." ABC's pit bull Sam Donaldson then lectured him about the difference between a "summary" and a "transcription"; Carter backtracked, lamely; Press Secretary Jody Powell kicked up a distracting shouting match with the reporters; and Carter's numbers in Texas continued their slide. The Ford camp moved the state to its top-priority list—quickly cutting several commercials starring John Wayne.

This was a historic development. It had been a remarkable innovation when Barry Goldwater toured the Deep South for Richard Nixon in 1960—wearing "a Confederate uniform," Lyndon Johnson darkly joked—since no Republican had ever won electoral votes there. Then, in 1964, Goldwater won Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana. When Richard Nixon attempted to repeat the accomplishment in 1968, intimating his sympathy for the region's desire to keep the federal government from forcing racial desegregation upon it, it was dubbed the "Southern strategy." When he swept the South along with almost all the rest of the nation in 1972, experts wondered whether the Party of Lincoln had flipped Dixie for good.

Then, however, the Democrats *nominated* a Southerner, and pundits began talking about the Republican Southern strategy as a thing of the past.

But now Carter was detouring to shore up his Southern flank. The *Playboy* interview rendered him a figure of mockery in this most pious of American regions—as when, at a rally in Nashville, someone held up a sign reading "SMILE IF YOU'RE HORNY." He also said, during the same event, "We've been deeply wounded in the last eight years. We have been hit by hammer blows in the Nixon-Ford administration"—an unforced tactical error: media referees called a foul on Carter for implicitly tying Ford too closely to Watergate, an unacceptably low blow.

He was foundering in big Northern cities, too, where his "anti-politician" ways drove leaders of urban political machines to distraction. Jules Witcover of the *Baltimore Sun* said the old clubhouse pols treated Carter "like a naturalized Martian rather than as a fellow soldier." He gave Democratic congressional leaders the cold shoulder, didn't pay respects to past Democratic presidential candidates, and was even said to hold his party's royal family, the Kennedys, in contempt—and who ever heard of a Democrat doing that? Boston's mayor called Carter "a very strange guy, and people out there sense it too."

Ford began gaining—until *his* campaign was rocked by a gaffe.

It turned on the issue of race. Richard Nixon had once been a friend to Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement, receiving 40 percent of the Black vote in 1960. Then, however, the Republican Party changed directions on the issue for good: they nominated Barry Goldwater, who voted against the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He got only 6 percent of the Black vote. In 1968, Nixon followed Goldwater's lead, aiming his appeal at white segregationists in the South, and white Northerners opposed to busing to desegregate public schools. In 1972, nonwhites were practically the only voters who *didn't* support Richard Nixon, giving him 13 percent. But for some Republicans this new reality had not yet sunk in. Mal MacDougall predicted Ford would receive "what a Republican presidential candidate can normally expect": 30 percent of the Black vote.

Not likely now. Late in September a *Rolling Stone* dispatch related a conversation that took place aboard an airplane bearing pop star Sonny Bono, the squeaky-clean crooner Pat Boone, and a member of Ford's cabinet to California after the Republican convention.

"It seems to me that the Party of Abraham Lincoln could and should be able to attract more Black people," Boone reflected. "Why can't this be done?"

The cabinet secretary smiled mischievously: "I'll tell you why you can't attract coloreds. Because the coloreds only want three things. You know what they want?"

Boone shook his head.

"It's three things: first, a tight pussy; second, loose shoes; and third, a warm place to shit. That's all!"

Another magazine divined that the jokester was Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. He was an enormously consequential figure, the person most responsible for radically transforming American farming from a family-based to an industrial enterprise, but now the main thing he would be remembered for was a racist dirty joke. The press pounced—once their nervous editors figured out how to report it in a sufficiently family-friendly manner. (In San Diego, the biggest local paper offered readers a copy of the unexpurgated text only upon written request.) Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, a Republican, the Senate's only African American, demanded Butz's resignation. Ford dithered for several days, then, on October 3, he convened a press conference at which an ashen-faced Butz announced he was quitting, then left the room; then, Ford warmly praised him.

A boost from Ronald Reagan sure would have helped about then. Dole traveled to Reagan's home to negotiate more campaign appearances. Reagan agreed to only one, in New Haven (where, he said, he was visiting his son for the Yale homecoming game), and refused a spot as honorary campaign chairman. In a driveway press conference, he once more praised the Republican platform; then, asked if Ford should campaign beyond the White House, mocked him. ("*Wellll* he's sure got the best-televised Rose Garden in America.") He had just published a column hymning the platform's "Morality in Foreign Policy" plank, "unique in party platform history in its implicit recognition of past foreign policy mistakes under the party's own leadership"—which meant Ford's leadership.

He finally agreed to tape some commercials. The scripts he submitted kept referring to the tainted word "Republican," which the campaign's strategy was to avoid at all costs. After Reagan refused to rewrite them, MacDougall concluded, "It was pretty clear to me that Reagan was either coming into this thing on his terms—and with his scripts—or not coming in at all."

THE REPUBLICANS DEBUTED A SLICK NEW SET OF COMMERCIALS WITH THE slogan "President Ford: He's Making Us Proud Again"; and an intentionally *non*-slick commercial starring the amiable Black entertainer Pearl Bailey. ("I'm not reading this off any paper. . . . I like Gerald Ford. I don't know who you like. But mostly he has something I like very much in every human being—simplicity, and honesty." Then, with an authentic-sounding catch in her voice: "I don't know, please think about it!")

Carter spoke at the National Conference of Catholic Charities. He said that he believed the family was the "cornerstone of American life," regretted that "our government has no family policy, and that is the same as an anti-family policy," and promised a White House conference on the subject. This would prove an important development in years to come.

Ford signed a tax relief bill in the Oval Office. His handlers would have preferred the Rose Garden, but forecasts predicted rain.

Then it was off to prepare for the second televised debate, on foreign policy.

Ford scrimmaged with the help of another innovation of Bob Teeter's: demographically representative audiences pressed a button to register their reactions in real time. Carter was drilled to look at the camera and smile more—and to attack the Republican from the right. He answered the first question with steely eyes, sounding like Reagan: "Our country is not strong anymore; we're not respected anymore. . . . We talk about détente. The Soviet Union knows what they want in détente, and they've been winning. We have not known what we wanted, and we've been out-traded in almost every instance."

He looked into the camera and smiled—one of forty-two grins that night, according to researchers from the State University of New York at Buffalo, compared to eight in the first: "This is one instance in which I agree with the Republican platform."

("That stiff, prissy man on the screen," the former Mrs. John F. Kennedy, Jacqueline Onassis, clucked to a friend.)

Max Frankel, a distinguished *New York Times* editor, in a follow-up question to Ford, *also* suggested détente had gone too far. "Our allies in France and Italy are now flirting with Communism. We've recognized a permanent Communist regime in East Germany; we virtually signed, in Helsinki, an agreement that the Russians have dominance in Eastern Europe, we bailed out Soviet agriculture with our huge grain sales, we've given them large loans, access to our best technology. Is that what you call a two-way street of traffic in Europe?"

"Helsinki" referred to a 1975 accord in which the Soviet Union acknowledged the importance of the principle of human rights in exchange for the U.S. affirming the territorial integrity of the Eastern European states within the Soviets' sphere of influence—which conservatives decried as a permanent surrender to Soviet control. Ford had worked very hard rehearsing an answer meant to deflect that impression. He was supposed to affirm "the independence, the sovereignty, and the autonomy of all Eastern European countries," while asserting "we do not recognize any sphere of influence by any power in Europe." He delivered the first part flawlessly, noting that among the Helsinki signatories was the Vatican, and that "I can't under any circumstances believe that His Holiness would agree, by signing that agreement, that the thirty-five nations have turned over to the Warsaw Pact nations the domination of Eastern Europe."

He muffed the second part. He said, "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford administration."

From the panelists' table in front of the stage, the moderator called for Carter's riposte—but Frankel broke in incredulously:

"I'm sorry, could I just follow—did I understand you to say, sir, that the Russians are not using Eastern Europe as their own sphere of influence and occupying most of the countries there and making sure with their troops that it's a Communist zone, whereas on our side of the line the Italians and the French are still flirting with the possibility of Communism?"

Ford dug in: "I don't believe, Mr. Frankel, that the Yugoslavians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don't believe that the Romanians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don't believe that the Poles consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union . . ."—and when it came time for Carter to respond, he practically giggled: "I would like to see Mr. Ford convince the Polish Americans and the Czech Americans and the Hungarian Americans in this country that those countries don't live under the domination and supervision of the Soviet Union behind the Iron Curtain."

Ford's coaches had implored him: no matter what Jimmy Carter said, he need only underscore the words *peace* and *experience*. "He could have answered every conceivable question with just those two things," Ford's media advisor Doug Bailey sighed ruefully to a reporter later. Bailey paused for a long time, then shrugged. "I guess he froze."

Had he? At first, Ford's political people didn't think they had a crisis on their hands. Dick Cheney, keeping score backstage, thought his man had won nine questions to five; Ford's debate coach scored it fourteen to zero. And according to Bob Teeter's first poll, 11 percent more viewers thought Ford was the winner than named Carter. Henry Kissinger, however, thought differently. In his customarily obsequious manner, he told Ford he thought he'd done marvelously—then screamed to his protégé Brent Scowcroft that playing down Soviet domination of Eastern Europe was a political disaster. He was correct. Almost immediately, commentators began latching onto Ford's "no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe" formulation as a bubbleheaded misstatement, a "gaffe"—evidence that Ford was losing a step.

The facts were more complicated. Ford was speaking accurately about a complex reality on the ground. Conservatives described the nations occupied by the Soviet Union after World War II as an undifferentiated mass of "slave states." But Poland had resisted Russian control to a sufficient degree that Eisenhower granted it most favored nation trade status. (Joseph Stalin himself had supposedly observed that trying to impose his will on Poland was like trying to saddle a cow.) Kennedy said America should "seize the initiative when the opportunity arises" to reward Communist Bloc states for good behavior. Richard Nixon said Eastern Europe countries were "sovereign, not part of a monolith."

This was why Ford refused to apologize for what he saw, at worst, as an infelicity of expression. But reporters kept pestering him. Eastern European ethnic leaders—who had prevailed upon Congress in 1959 to establish a Captive Nations Week observance every July—piled on, too. "Our people do usually vote Democratic," said Aloysius Mazewski of the Polish American Congress, "but we were aware that many of them were not enthusiastic about Carter and were going to vote for President Ford. I think many of them will go back to the Democratic side now." Carter said Ford's words "disgraced our country."

That was the interpretation that stuck: "After twenty-four hours of being told it was a bad mistake," Ford's White House spokesman Ron Nessen lamented, "the public changed their minds." Teeter took another poll in which respondents gave the victory to *Carter* by a margin of 45 points. Ford had dared complexity where simplicity was supposed to reside. But with the joke circulating that people were hoarding "Poles for Ford" buttons as collectors' items, and Carter's running mate, Walter "Fritz" Mondale, joking that he could now drink for free in Polish bars, Ford surrendered. He called Mazewski with a groveling apology. They said this election was about forthrightness. But, plainly, not *too much*.

IT WAS AROUND THEN, HIS CAMPAIGN ROCKED ON ITS HEELS, THAT GERALD Ford's people began contemplating a new sort of Southern strategy—with religion, not race, at its center.

Back in August, at a strategy meeting, Bob Teeter had recited the findings of a Gallup poll: 39 percent of Americans said they'd had a life-changing experience of the presence of Jesus Christ at a time and place they could identify, 72 percent read the Bible regularly, and 71 percent thought political leaders should pray before making decisions. "We've got to have Billy Graham on the ticket," Doug Bailey replied. His partner, John Deardourff, nominated TV faith healer Oral Roberts. Someone suggested Ford could perform a small miracle at the Republican convention. Teeter warned them not to joke. "It could be the most powerful political force ever harvested. . . . They've got an underground communications network. And Jimmy Carter is plugged right into it."

Then the next month the Almighty bestowed upon Gerald Ford a miracle—that *Playboy* interview.

"Evangelicals Seen Cooling on Carter," read the *Washington Post* front page on September 27. It recalled an address the previous June at the annual meeting of America's largest Protestant denomination: Southern Baptist Convention president Reverend Bailey Smith, who pastored an Oklahoma church with ten thousand members, said the country needed a "born-again man in the White House." Some shuddered; Southern Baptists, the *Post* pointed out, "customarily prided themselves on their neutrality in political matters, on the non-hierarchical organization of their denomination." But others were thrilled—and gave him a standing ovation when he roared next, *"And his initials are the same as our Lord's!"* Now, however, Smith said he wasn't even sure he'd vote for Jimmy Carter.

It had become apparent that Carter was an awkward fit with his coreligionists. He talked about legalizing marijuana. And appreciated liberal theologians. And palled around with Bob Dylan and the Allman Brothers; he was just not *one of us*. The SBC had been officially founded in 1845 after the national Baptists forbade slave owners from serving as missionaries. In 1918, an influential statement of the denomination's mission, *The Call of the South*, argued that God had let the Confederacy lose the Civil War in order to steel Southerners to rescue the rest of the nation from the "new gospel of 'tolerance,'" the "false faiths" of "rationalism" and "liberalism"—"Antichrist teachings under the guise of religion." Now more and more Southern Baptists were returning to these reactionary roots, making activism against feminism, homosexuality—and pornography in magazines like *Playboy*—part of their spiritual calling.

The bicentennial year was the watershed. Jerry Falwell, the Southern Baptist televangelist, staged "I Love America" rallies in 141 cities, frequently on the steps of state capitol buildings, starring fresh-faced undergrads from his own Liberty Baptist College, who sang patriotic songs accompanied by what they called "stage movements." (Dancing was a sin.) In 1965 he had published a widely distributed sermon aimed at Martin Luther King Jr., arguing, "Preachers are called to be soul-winners, not politicians." But now, at these rallies, his fiery sermon concluded with a line from II Chronicles that joined civic and theological vocations seamlessly: "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land." Then, he would duck inside the marble halls to lobby.

A Fairfax, Virginia, minister named Robert Thoburn, author of *How to Establish and Operate a Successful Christian School*, whom conservatives admired because his own school was a for-profit business, ran unsuccessfully for Congress. So did the president of a fundamentalist college in Hammond, Indiana, Reverend Robert Billings, author of *A Guide to the Christian School*. A congressman from Arizona, John Conlan, together with Bill Bright of the Campus Crusade for Christ, began Third Century Press, which published books like *One Nation Under God*, by Rus Walton, which averred, "The Constitution was designed to perpetuate a Christian order." Their organization, the Christian Freedom Foundation, sent 120,000 ministers pitches to join "Intercessors for America," whose membership benefits included Walton's book *The Five Duties of a Christian Citizen* and a manual about how to elect "real Christians" to office by adopting a familiar Christian activity—home Bible study sessions—to

organize precincts. Explained Conlan, "The House of Representatives, which is composed of 435 members, is controlled by a simple majority of 218. At this time, there are at least 218 people in the House who follow in some degree the secular humanist philosophy which is so dangerous to our future."

Conlan ran for the Senate. His primary opponent was Jewish. One of his slogans was "A vote for Conlan is a vote for Christianity." Barry Goldwater, whose father was born Jewish, and Goldwater's best friend, Harry Rosenzweig, the Jewish former chairman of the Arizona Republican Party, abandoned Conlan. He lost, left Congress, and threw himself into evangelical political organizing full-time. His ally Bright raised $25,000 each from twenty Christian businessmen, like Richard DeVos of the Amway Corporation, to purchase a Louis XIV–style mansion that had previously been inhabited by Washington D.C.'s Catholic archbishop, anointing it the "Christian Embassy."

Bright and Conlan insisted their efforts were nonpartisan and nonideological: anyone was welcome to join. Then, the liberal evangelical magazine *Sojourners* published an exposé revealing that their organizing manual suggested screening candidates with the question "How do you feel about Nelson Rockefeller or Ronald Reagan as presidential candidates?" (A preference for the tribune of the Republican Party's liberal wing was disqualifying.) Bright insisted, "Campus Crusade is not political—in twenty-five years it has never been." But the article also quoted him as saying in Campus Crusade's magazine *Worldwide Challenge*, "There are 435 congressional districts, and I think Christians can capture many of them by next November," and Conlan's opinion of the Senate's two proudest evangelical Christians, Mark Hatfield and Harold Hughes—who were liberals—"These are not the kind people we want in government. We don't even want them to know what's going on." *Sojourners'* editor, Jim Wallis, complained that Bright and Conlan's project "gives an excuse for a lot of evangelicals who would like to find a reason not to vote for a Christian they perceive as a Democratic liberal."

The cascading damage from the *Playboy* interview suggested Wallis was right. A preacher from Pennsylvania said of Carter, "I do not feel he has been 'born again.' . . . He approves of social drinking." Jerry Falwell—whose *Old Time Gospel Hour* aired Sundays on 260 television stations, "sixty-five more than Lawrence Welk," the *Washington Post* noted—announced, "Like many, I am quite disillusioned. . . . Four months ago most of the people I knew were pro-Carter. Today, that has totally reversed."

The Carter campaign, busy reaching out to Democratic interest groups from feminists to homosexuals to union members—and *Playboy* readers—took the evangelical vote for granted. The crisis exposed a political Achilles' heel: Carter's success so far had been built on seeming to be all things to all constituencies—constituencies often at war with one another. Now, for the first time, a bill for this ideological profligacy came due—and the Ford campaign spied opportunity.

AT FIRST THE PRESIDENT, A STAID EPISCOPALIAN, WAS RELUCTANT TO TALK about faith; the campaign pressed the message via surrogates, like Ford's seminarian son Mike, who said, "Jimmy Carter wears his religion on his sleeve but Jerry Ford wears it in his heart," and released Ford's private letter to an evangelical film producer named Billy Zeoli: "Because I trusted Christ to be my savior, my life is His."

Then, Ford stuck his finger in the wind, and took the plunge himself.

Shortly after the foreign policy debate, Ford hosted thirty-four evangelical leaders—proprietors of telecasts like *Back to the Bible* and *The Hour of Freedom*, executives from Billy Graham's ministry and the Campus Crusade for Christ, Christian radio station owners, publishers, Bible college deans—for seventy minutes in the cabinet room. The star attendee was a preacher who'd first come to the nation's attention after *Brown v. Board of Education*, when he demanded, "Don't force me by law, by statute, by Supreme Court decision . . . to cross over in those intimate things where I don't want to go. Let me build my life. Let me have my church. Let me have my school. Let me have my friends. Let me have my home. Let me have my family. And what you give to me, give to every man in America and keep it like our glorious forefathers made—a land of the free and the home of the brave." He also said the movement for racial integration was "aching of idiocy and foolishness," that the "idea of the universal brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God is a denial of everything in the Bible," and that civil rights activists were "a bunch of infidels, dying from the neck up." He claimed to have never seen a movie in his life and never intended to—until an actor named Ronald Reagan persuaded him that not *all of them* were sinful. ("I'm going to start going to some movies, and I'll tell my congregation that it's not a sin to see certain types of movies.") His name was Dr. W. A. "Wally" Criswell, and, Ford's campaign manager James Baker explained, "he's acknowledged as a leader not only among Southern Baptists but among evangelicals"—apparently unaware that "Southern Baptist" was a *subset* of evangelicals.

In 1960, when his First Baptist Church in Dallas had some fourteen thousand members, Criswell led a national day of prayer against the ascension of a Catholic to the White House—which would "spell the death of a free church in a free state and our hopes of continuance of full religious liberty in America." In 1968 he became the president of the Southern Baptist Convention. By 1972, he had come around on the question of

segregation—but thundered so angrily against Richard Nixon's opening to Communist China that the president invited him to the White House to talk him down. In 1975, when Betty Ford praised legalized abortion on *60 Minutes* and took in stride the idea of her teenage daughter having a premarital affair, Reverend Criswell made national news again. "That's a gutter-type mentality," he said. "That's animal thinking." In the summer of 1976, he approvingly predicted a huge evangelical showing for Carter.

Then he and his colleagues met with the president in the cabinet room. Ford explained that his religion had "a tremendous subjective impact" on his decision-making, that he had "a deep concern about the rising tide of secularism," and that he and Betty read the Bible each and every night. Impressed, Criswell invited the president to pray in his church.

IT COINCIDED WITH A FINAL PIVOT IN FORD'S ELECTORAL CALCULATIONS. Carter held Texas by only a thread. Ford strategists had originally planned to concentrate on states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Illinois—the "big industrial states of the North," in the political reporters' cliché. Now they changed their mind. Which meant they were catching up with the electorate. For the "big industrial states" were no longer, comparatively, so big.

A 1969 book by Nixon aide Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, had been the first and most influential codification of the argument: the way forward for the Grand Old Party was exploiting conservative sentiment in the South and Southwest—the "Sun Belt." Demographic shifts informed the judgment. Changes in the number of votes states cast in the electoral college—calculated by adding up how many seats a state was apportioned in the 435-member House of Representatives plus each state's two senators—tell the story. In 1948, the year Ford was first elected to Congress, New York got forty-seven votes. In 1976, New York cast fory-one electoral votes. Pennsylvania went from thirty-five to twenty-seven, Illinois from twenty-eight to twenty-six. Meanwhile Florida's electoral votes doubled, Arizona's went up by half, and California replaced New York as the nation's most populous state. Reasons included the spread of air-conditioning, the Sun Belt's salubrious "business climate"—a term coined by General Electric executives in the 1950s to describe municipalities with low wages and weak unions—and the ballooning military-industrial complex, which appreciated a salubrious business climate, too: between 1950 and 1956, New York lost more than a third of its share of prime Defense Department contracts to the Sun Belt. Sun Belters were prickly about the Northeasterners who behaved as if the world still revolved around them—Texans most of all. So it was that, reviewing these facts in the context of Carter's LBJ gaffe, and Ford's success with the evangelicals, Ford's strategists scheduled a tour of the Lone Star State for the crucial second week in October, with Reverend Criswell's giant red-brick church as the first stop.

The interior was festooned with banners depicting Revolutionary War soldiers and Bicentennial thirteen-star flags. Criswell's hair was slicked back; he wore a cream-colored suit. He regaled his congregation with the story of his White House visit: "Mr. President," he recalled asking, "if *Playboy* magazine were to ask you for an interview, what would you do?" Ford replied, "I *was* asked by *Playboy* magazine for an interview, and I declined with an emphatic '*No*'!" Six thousand worshippers broke into a torrent of applause.

Then he berated Carter for saying in another interview that he was considering removing tax-exempt status from church businesses like radio stations, TV programs, colleges, and publishing companies. Criswell said reading that brought "dread and foreboding to my deepest soul.... To tax any of them is to tax the church... leading to the possibility of our destruction.... I hear Gerald Ford, our president, say boldly and courageously that he would interdict any such movement in America. May the Lord give him strength!"

The president, sitting beside what the pool reporter called "a full orchestra larger than most Broadway pit orchestras," beamed. The choir broke into Handel's "Worthy Is the Lamb." Criswell, described in the pool report as "organ-lunged," remarked, "I think if Handel looked down from heaven, he would be proud of this choir and this orchestra. And Mr. President, that's why the White House ought to be in Dallas, Texas, instead of Washington." He described a speech President Ford gave to the Southern Baptist Convention as "one of the most moving and masterful addresses I have ever heard in my life." Theatrically dabbing a tear from his eye, he described Ford's seminarian son as "a sweet humble boy." Then he called his White House visit "one of the highest days of my life." The pair made their way down the aisle and out onto the church steps, where one of the waiting reporters asked if this meant the pastor was making a presidential endorsement. "Yes," he said, fearing not for his church's tax-exempt status. "I am for him. I am for him."

FORD STUMPED ACROSS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF CALIFORNIA, WHERE the undecided vote was an astronomical 23 percent—and he did so *sans* the Golden State's most prominent Republican, who cited a "prior commitment," exactly the reason Reagan had given for neglecting to call on the White House during a recent visit to Washington. The "prior commitment" was a meeting with his political supporters at his ranch near

Santa Barbara, an article in the *Chicago Tribune* titled "Reagan Snubs Ford Campaign in California" reported.

The final debate woke viewers up only when Carter offered an apology, of sorts: "Other people have done it and are notable—Governor Jerry Brown; Walter Cronkite; Albert Schweitzer; Mr. Ford's own secretary of the treasury, Mr. William Simon; William Buckley; many other people. But they aren't running for President, and in retrospect, from hindsight, I would not have given that interview had I to do it over again."

The lowest percentage of the voting-age population since 1948, 55.5 percent, turned out on Election Day. "The public has the feeling of being nibbled to death by ducks, not addressed by giants as should be the case," ABC's Howard K. Smith said when it was finally over.

Mal MacDougall said, "If Reagan had been willing to really speak out for President Ford, really work for Ford, I feel convinced that we would have carried Texas. The same goes, of course, for Mississippi." That would have covered sixty-six of the fifty-seven electoral college votes Ford required to win. Very few the of the issues that would actually end up convulsing the nation over the next years had been substantively discussed. Another thing that found no representation in the media: that, at the same time the nation chose a Democratic president, conservatives were mobilizing with a passion, creativity, and energy never seen before.

CHAPTER 2

"What Is an Orrin Hatch?"

SHORTLY AFTER ELECTION DAY, THE *NEW YORK TIMES* PUBLISHED A LITTLE humor piece relating the story of a young couple in suburban Long Island searching for a cocktail party theme. "A party celebrating Jimmy Carter's victory? Oh, everyone was doing that"—so, instead, they invited their friends to an evening of "drinks and debauchery" in honor of the possessor of a funny name they noticed in the newspaper. One guest "went to the library to see what an Orrin Hatch was. Another wrote 'Orrin Hatch' backward in the hope of discovering a code. Yet another held the invitation up to a mirror." They realized "there were some conservatives who probably might have liked Mr. Hatch if they had known who he was." But none did. Probably because they got their news from the *New York Times*. Orrin Hatch had just been elected to the Senate from Utah and would go on to exert more influence on the course of American politics than anyone else elected in 1976 except—possibly—Jimmy Carter. But in the pages of the Newspaper of Record, a column making fun of his name was the most in-depth treatment he got.

The election sent a bumper crop of conservatives to Washington from the Midwest and West. Wyoming elected Malcolm Wallop to the Senate, two years after he lost a run for governor as an environmentalist. (The *Times* made fun of his name once, too.) Indianapolis mayor Richard Lugar beat three-term liberal Democratic senator Vance Hartke. Mickey Edwards, national chairman of the American Conservative Union, won a congressional seat in Oklahoma. Dan Quayle, the handsome young scion of a Fort Wayne, Indiana, newspaper family, only two years out of law school, felled a Democratic incumbent that experts had thought unbeatable. Southern California sent up a TV talk show host, Bob Dornan, who had once burned Jane Fonda in effigy; Harrison "Jack" Schmitt won New Mexico's Senate seat after promising to privatize Social Security. None received much coverage—not even the colorful linguist S. I. Hayakawa (a Japanese American, he defended the wartime internment of Japanese citizens, and had become a right-wing hero fighting student antiwar activists in the 1960s as president of San Francisco State University), even

though the new senator-elect would be representing the most populous state in the union after felling *another* supposedly unbeatable Democratic incumbent, and defeating three powerful establishment Republicans in the primary.

The *Boston Globe*, it is true, made note of the trend, in an editorial called "Last of the Mohicans." That they might be a political cutting edge, instead of representing the tattered remnants of a dying tribe, was the conclusion of precisely no one—nor was the expanding clout of Ronald Reagan, who, during the time he spent not campaigning for Gerald Ford, had been busy making all these victories possible.

UTAH'S NEW SENATOR-ELECT DEFEATED A DEMOCRAT NAMED FRANK MOSS—another incumbent previously considered unbeatable. Hatch was from a hardscrabble Pittsburgh family. He apprenticed at age sixteen as a lathe operator, then became the first in his family to attend college—which, since he came from a long line of Mormon elders, was Brigham Young in Provo. The brilliant student returned to Pittsburgh for law school on a full scholarship, housing his growing family in a former chicken coop while working the overnight shift as a dormitory desk attendant. Then he moved to Utah to work as a general counsel in the oil and gas industry.

He had neither political experience nor connections, so when he began sending out feelers about challenging Senator Moss in 1976 he met only discouragement. According to Hatch's own account, he was still undecided only hours before the filing deadline. Then he had lunch with the chairman of the Utah Republican Party, who told him that he could win for the same reason Jimmy Carter could: "This is going to be an election year of anti-Washington sentiment."

Hatch visited the former president of Brigham Young, Ernest Wilkinson, who was so conservative he had refused to accept federal funds lest the flagship Mormon university be subject to federal dictates, and refused to let economics professors teach Keynesianism—mainstream stuff most everywhere else, leftist heresy at BYU—even at the risk of the school losing its accreditation. Wilkinson liked the cut of this young man's jib and endorsed him.

A candidate became Utah's Republican senate nominee if he won 50 percent of the delegates to the state convention in August. If no one received an outright majority, the top two faced each other in a September runoff. One contender was a former four-term U.S. congressman. Another had been White House assistant to Richard Nixon. The third was Dwight D. Eisenhower's budget director. Traveling the vast state in his family's green van, plying his six children with milkshakes to keep them behaved, the unknown Hatch proved utterly ineffectual at the county conventions, where he received two minutes to present the case for why he, and not these eminent worthies, should enjoy the attendees' support. His mien was stern and unsmiling; staffers thought his official campaign photo made him look "like Beelzebub."

Desperate, he booked a recording studio, and recorded an argument similar to the one Barry Goldwater used against *his* establishment opponents in 1964: that they were "me-too Republicans"—hardly different from Democrats. With $3,000 in borrowed money, Hatch sent out cassette tapes wrapped in Bicentennial red, white, and blue to the 2,512 state convention delegates. (The package also included a transcript, printed on ersatz 1776-style parchment, for Utahans who did not own tape recorders.) He approached a stalwart of Utah's far right, W. Cleon Skousen, whose book *The Naked Communist* printed what Skousen claimed was a leaked copy of the Communist Party's secret plan to take over the United States. (Its components included "Encourage promiscuity and easy divorce," "Gain control of all student newspapers," and "Eliminate all good sculpture from parks and buildings, substitute shapeless, awkward and meaningless forms.") Skousen also liked the cut of Hatch's jib, affording him access to Skousen's extensive mailing list.

Then Hatch scored another coup. At a gathering of Republicans north of Provo, a voter asked the aspirants whether they supported Gerald Ford or Ronald Reagan for president. The first two candidates hedged. The third endorsed Ford. All received polite applause. The outsider's turn came:

"I give my unqualified support to Ronald Reagan, and I believe that, if he is nominated, he will be our next president."

He got a frenzied ovation. He began repeating his endorsement everywhere he went—then finished in second at the state convention, qualifying for the runoff. He scrounged up enough money to retain the services of a high-end campaign consultant for a single day. The consultant advised him to call someone named Richard Viguerie, the godfather of a nascent political movement: the New Right. This proved his biggest bonanza yet.

THE TERM "NEW RIGHT" WAS COINED IN 1974 BY THE WRITER AND FORMER Nixon Justice Department official Kevin Phillips. One of the figures he was describing, a man named Paul Weyrich, was once asked to explain what made the New Right new. He answered that they weren't really conservatives. They were "radicals working to overturn the present power structure in this country."

The New Right's discontinuities from the old one would be exaggerated in the years to come—not least by its self-mythologizing leaders. But there were some important differences. For one thing, they believed Barry Goldwater, in whose presidential campaign many had cut their political teeth, was by then too much a member of the establishment to retain their respect. That made the outsider Orrin Hatch a natural recruit. "I'm a non-politician," he liked to say. "I've spent most of my professional life fighting the growing, oppressive federal bureaucracy, mostly for working people."

That notion—conservatism as an ideology for working people—was another New Right theme. Viguerie's father had been a construction worker; his mother toiled in a paper mill and sold milk from the family cow. Another movement principal was the son of a furnace stoker. Kevin Phillips grew up in the Bronx, and excoriated "conservatives whose game it is to quote English poetry and utter neo-Madisonian benedictions over the interests and institutions of establishment liberalism." He wished instead to build "a cultural siege-engine out of the populist steel of Idaho, Mississippi, and working-class Milwaukee, and then blast the Eastern liberal establishment to ideological-institutional smithereens." Another New Right pioneer said he was fighting "a guerrilla battle at the grassroots of a generation of lower-middle-class people who feel betrayed and exploited."

For the left, employers were the exploiters. The New Right replied that the true exploiters were federal bureaucrats grasping for tax dollars, and the media elites who shoved 1960s libertinism down Middle America's throats. New Rightists were obsessed with what were known as the "social issues"—crime, government intrusion into family life, sexual mores, the right to own a gun. Reagan's establishmentarian presidential campaign manager John Sears dismissed them as the "emotional issues." But the New Right *reveled* in emotion—particularly the emotion of resentment.

The prototypical New Right crusade was a movement in 1974 of fundamentalist Christians in the union stronghold Kanawha County, West Virginia, against the "educrats" who issued textbooks they considered ungodly. The protests escalated to the point of dynamiting the school board building. The Heritage Foundation, the New Right's new think tank, sent a lawyer to represent the alleged bombers, and introduced the Kanawha organizers to fellow anti-textbook crusaders around the country. "We talk about issues that people care about," Weyrich said unapologetically: a voter brought into the conservative tent via an "alliance on family issues is bound to begin to look at the morality of other issues"—like "the unjust power that has been legislated for union bosses."

Jimmy Carter's pollster Pat Caddell understood how dangerous all this could prove to the Democratic coalition: blue-collar voters were vulnerable to conservative appeals because they were "no longer solely motivated by economic concerns—which have traditionally made them Democrats." Now that they feared "change in society" more than losing their place in the middle class, they were "one of the most vulnerable groups in the

Democratic coalition." The New Right social-issue strategy was rooted in just that—and not, at least at first, in the ideological convictions of its leaders. Those were more along the lines of the ones Barry Goldwater wrote about in *Conscience of a Conservative* in 1960: ending farm subsidies and the progressive income tax, facing down the Soviets even at the risk of nuclear war—the sort of notions that, when Goldwater ran for president, scared voters half to death. So the New Right searched for more tantalizing lures. As organizer Howard Phillips put it: "We organize discontent." Organizing discontent meant foraging for *whatever* issues roused an otherwise apathetic citizenry to conservative political action. Presently, social issues were it.

THE HEART OF THE NEW RIGHT WAS A VERY SMALL LEADERSHIP CADRE, whose political roots were in the lonely work of conservative organizing during the Kennedy years. Howard Phillips came from a Jewish New Deal family in working-class Boston. In the early 1960s, he helped found the conservative youth group Young Americans for Freedom—and proved himself a shrewd enough politician to win office as student body president at liberal Harvard. In 1971 he was appointed by President Nixon to head the Office of Economic Opportunity, which administered the federal war on poverty. Phillips loaded it up with so many young conservatives that veteran OEO bureaucrats started referring to Phillips' "YAFia." Then, however, in 1973, Phillips was let go after the press got wind of what Nixon had actually hired him to do at the OEO: dismantle it. Phillips believed Nixon had given up without a fight. So he founded Conservatives for the Removal of the President to fight for his impeachment—not because of Watergate, but because, Phillips later explained, Nixon "was the most liberal president in American history, except Gerald Ford."

Shortly afterward, Senator Jesse Helms gave a speech to the American Conservative Union noting that only 38 percent of eligible voters had turned out for the congressional elections following Nixon's resignation. He argued that a plan targeting that nonvoting 62 percent—the "conservative majority," he called it—could set the political world on its ear. Young Phillips boldly approached Helms with just such a plan: a stealth grassroots organization with cells in all 435 congressional districts, to surface only once its infrastructure was in place, with the goal of taking over one or both of the political parties. ("It doesn't matter which party succeeds. Principles matter.") Helms conferred his blessing—then Phillips approached a political friend to help put the plan into action. That friend was Richard Viguerie. And once Phillips secured *his* participation, they were well on their way.

Viguerie's story would be told and retold many times in the decades to come, like right-wing holy writ. It began in 1961, when the twenty-eight-year-old was hired as a fundraiser by the right's P. T. Barnum, Marvin Liebman, the middle-age man who ran Young Americans for Freedom. The first thing Liebman told him was that YAF actually had two thousand paid members, but that he should always claim there were twenty-five thousand. That was another secret to the New Right's success: an eagerness to accept that their end—the survival of Western civilization—most decidedly justified nearly any means.

In 1965, Viguerie went into business for himself, renting a one-room office on Capitol Hill and marching a squad of temps into the office of the clerk of the House of Representatives, where, under the campaign finance laws then in effect, the identities of every citizen who had donated $50 or more to Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign were preserved. The hired secretaries scrawled as many names and addresses as they could before being chased from the premises by a nervous bureaucrat. Viguerie purchased fifty thousand more from a fundraiser for charities, then inherited more from his mentor Liebman, loaded on metal "Addressograph" plates that he packed into the trunk of his family car. A friend who operated Catholic Charities' mainframe computer moonlighted on the project after hours, transferring the data onto a reel of magnetic computer tape, so Viguerie could automate thousands of fundraising letters at a time. They were "my treasure trove, as good as the gold bricks deposited at Fort Knox." They became the foundation of an ideological empire.

Viguerie went to school on the august forebears who had mastered the arcane science of selling magazine subscriptions, encyclopedias, and charitable contributions by "direct mail"—what another mentor, Walter H. Weintz of *Reader's Digest*, called the "solid gold mailbox." "RAVCO" (for Richard A. Viguerie Company) began building a client base: the World Anti-Communist League, the National Right to Work Committee, the National Rifle Association, No Amnesty for Deserters, Citizens for Decent Literature—and George C. Wallace, for whose 1968 presidential campaign RAVCO raised some $6 million, an unheard-of 76 percent of the total. Each client—especially Wallace—helped Viguerie's mailing lists grow and grow and grow. So in November of 1974, Howard Phillips began recruiting for his new organization, which he named the Conservative Caucus, with a direct mail "piece" RAVCO sent to more than *two million* solid gold mailboxes:

> *Dear Friend:*
>
> *Are you as sick and tired as I am of liberal politicians who: Force children to be bused; appoint judges who turn murderers and rapists*

> *loose on the public; force your children to study from school books that are anti-God, anti-American, and filled with the most vulgar curse words; give your tax money to communists, anarchist and other radical organizations; do nothing about sex, adultery and homosexuality and foul language on television?*
>
> *Are you tired of feeling no power to change things? If so, why don't you join the Conservative Caucus?*

It was signed by Governor Meldrim Thomson of New Hampshire, the group's honorary chairman and a key figure in Reagan's 1976 presidential campaign. It was likely written by Viguerie; crafting such hair-on-fire prose was his favorite part of the job. Lurid invocations of sexual iniquity were a constant—because, according to Weyrich, sex was "the Achilles heel of the liberal Democrats." The pitch attracted half a million dollars from 36,840 members in the next seven months. "There's no doubt about it," Howard Phillips told an interviewer. "Viguerie really is the godfather."

Phillips began operating out of a warren of offices stuffed with other conservative organizations above the Boston pizzeria of one of his board members. A visiting journalist described him as a "great hulk of a man who always looks as if he could use a trip to the cleaners." Naturally. There was a civilization to win, and the hour was late. He wrote a leadership manual setting forth steps to organize a congressional district in exactly 153 days. "By 1980," he said in 1976, "there will be conservative control of the House. The Senate will follow shortly thereafter." He sounded like V. I. Lenin in 1913. No coincidence: studying radical organizers was one of his only hobbies.

In 1974, President Ford had chosen to keep on Henry Kissinger, co-architect of détente with the Soviet Union, which some conservatives considered close to treason, as his secretary of state. Viguerie summoned a dozen outraged politicos to his Virginia headquarters to game-plan a strategy to tank the nomination. What he saw horrified him: "The conservative leaders in that room didn't know how to go from Point A to Point Z," he told one of the many visiting journalists who came by his office to interview him in the years to come. "I saw very dramatically that nobody knew how to organize."

Paul Weyrich knew how to organize. He always claimed his awakening came while sitting in on a meeting of liberal activists trying to pass a federal open housing bill—another of those legends that became right-wing holy writ. A think tank officer was commissioned to write a research report. A White House staffer was instructed to keep the president on task. Senate aides were dispatched to ride herd on Capitol Hill. Civil rights leaders agreed to flush protesters into the streets. *This* was how liberalism had stolen Americans' conservative birthright, Weyrich reflected. "I saw how easily it could be done with planning and determination, and I decided to try it myself."

Weyrich was a former radio newsman from Wisconsin who turned his political hobby into a vocation after working for Barry Goldwater in 1964. In 1968, he converted to the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, having concluded that his natal Roman Catholics had fallen to liberalism. In 1971, Weyrich and a former senate staffer named Ed Feulner raised $250,000 from the beer magnate Joseph Coors and $900,000 from the petroleum heir Richard Mellon Scaife to found a more combative alternative to the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank which, fearing for its IRS tax exemption and its reputation for scholarly probity, was loath to take sides in partisan disputes. For men like Weyrich, who drew their moral imagination from legends of the twilight struggle between lightness and dark as limned by former Communists like Whittaker Chambers, probity was counterrevolutionary. "We're not here to be some kind of Ph.D. committee giving equal time," the Heritage Foundation's first research director explained. Indeed, Weyrich soon quit, finding Heritage not nearly aggressive enough. His next group, midwifed with the proceeds from a Viguerie letter signed by Senator Carl Curtis, was called the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress. By Election Day 1974 it had distributed $412,248 in cash and services to seventy-one candidates. A reporter, noting that Weyrich's father was a German immigrant, said he retained "the precise orderliness of his Teutonic forebears, but none of their rollicking good humor. His mien is that of a formal, slightly constipated owl. He speaks in the clipped phrases of a man in a hurry."

Another piece of the New Right organizational puzzle involved campaign finance law. The legal vehicle known as the political action committee was not new; in 1943, after Congress prohibited campaign donations from labor unions, John Lewis and Sidney Hillman of the Congress of Industrial Organizations formed CIO-PAC to bundle individual contributions from members and route them to favored politicians. After the 1974 election, two veterans of the cutthroat world of conservative youth politics, Terry Dolan and Charlie Black, pointed Senator Helms to a loophole in the new post-Watergate laws intended to *limit* political fundraising: PACs could spend as much as they wanted on candidates, so long as they did not *coordinate* with the candidate. Helms helped them form the National Conservative Political Action Committee to provide candidates the things parties traditionally provided—press agentry, voter surveys, advertising consultants, campaign management, *cash*. But where the Republican National Committee was constitutionally bound to aid *all* Republicans, the National Conservative Political Action Committee need only nourish the ideologically correct. Dolan of NCPAC became the youngest figure in the New Right's central leadership cadre, with Viguerie, Phillips, and Weyrich.

NCPAC, CSFC, RAVCO, and more—this new Washington alphabet soup looked, and was reported as, a complex, variegated, and spontaneous grassroots revolt. Actually, the only thing complicated about it was the legal structure. One observer would soon write, "Any diagram of its organization looks like an octopus trying to shake hands with itself."

And, as Orrin Hatch's outreach from the Utah desert soon demonstrated, all it took was a single phone call to mobilize the entire beast.

HATCH CHECKED ALL THE NEW RIGHT'S BOXES. SOCIAL ISSUES: ONE OF HIS campaign promises was an anti-pornography law. ("We can define it as a law that would ban the sharing of human genitalia, for instance," he explained bashfully in a TV interview. "And the use of certain, uh, very vulgar, uh, words.") And social issues as a *wedge* to open up the possibility for undermining the reach of the liberal state—for instance, in another of his campaign proposals, organizing "a panel of the nation's top insurance actuaries" to work on privatizing Social Security. Paul Weyrich had met him at the Republican convention in Kansas City, and concluded Hatch might be presidential timber—though he was not yet even a Senate nominee, with no real prospect of becoming one.

Until, that is, a miracle arrived.

For months, his campaign had been frantically reaching out to Ronald Reagan. One influential Republican advised him to give up, for Reagan was said to follow an "Eleventh Commandment": never take sides in primaries. But Orrin Hatch was a very confident man. He became convinced that if they could only *talk* to Reagan, they could win him over. Aides pestered Reagan's man Michael Deaver by phone, until, worn down, Deaver told their pollster, Dick Wirthlin, a Mormon, about it—and Wirthlin said that his native state was trending so far right that this newcomer just might have a chance. The campaign was provided the phone number where Reagan was vacationing at the ranch of one of his rich friends. Hatch's novice twenty-five-year-old campaign manager dialed it and began fervently pleading his case. A faint voice interrupted:

"Tell Hatch I will be happy to endorse."

"Say that again, sir."

"Tell Hatch I'd be happy to endorse him!"

"Mr. Reagan, would you be so kind as to send us a telegram confirming our conversation for the press?"

"Well, yes, when do you need it?"

"The minute I hang up, sir!"

Full page ads ran the Sunday before the runoff election, prepared so hastily they contained a typo, "telegraph" instead of "telegram": "A TELEGRAPH FROM RONALD REAGAN TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF UTAH. 'To my many friends in Utah, I want to express my gratitude for the outstanding support I received from the people of Utah in my bid for the presidency. Now the time has come for me to do everything I can to endorse a man of quality, courage, discipline and integrity; a man of demonstrated ability, strength, and vision; a man who believes in individual freedom and self-reliance. With these qualities in mind, I enthusiastically endorse Orrin Hatch.'" On Monday, radio ads broadcast a recording of Reagan reiterating the endorsement. On Tuesday, Hatch beat the establishment's candidate in the runoff by a margin of two-to-one. The New Right had its first Senate nominee.

ORRIN HATCH'S OPPONENT, SENATOR FRANK MOSS, AUTHORED A LANDmark 1974 law greatly expanding the power of the Federal Trade Commission to regulate industry. He published a slashing exposé of the nursing home business. He wrote the bills banning cigarette advertising on television and establishing federal standards for product warranties. He had been an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War. He had also, the Mormon paper the *Deseret News* noted, earned "credibility among Utah voters as a hardworking senator who has kept his nose reasonably clean," with a "positive voting record where bread-and-butter issues are concerned"—which was traditionally how liberal Democrats had won over enough culturally conservative voters to win elections. And though he came off on TV as a bit of a smug liberal paternalist, he had recently received national publicity for going undercover to expose Medicaid fraud, and like Hatch supported a constitutional amendment banning abortion. He wasn't a Bolshevik. He was a Mormon.

He was also, however, a liberal Democrat in an increasingly conservative state, tacking to the right to save his hide: trumpeting support from mining executives, boasting of his filibuster of aggressive amendments to the Clean Air Act. Hatch replied that Moss supported legislation limiting strip mining and supported "federal land use planning"—which Skousen types considered a government conspiracy to Sovietize private land.

It worked. Moss began trailing. He started skipping debates. He sighed, "There's been a continued drift to the right."

He was correct.

In Moss's Utah, the Division of Health had announced its intention to add one part per million of fluoride to the state's drinking water to prevent tooth decay. Newspaper letters pages filled with outrage: "to require me to drink fluoridated water just because some 'experts' say it is not harmful is a violation of my rights"; "I resent others trying to force their will on me"; "Will a non-elected bureaucrat be able to force on us whatever he may wish?" Conservatives gathered enough signatures to get a proposition they called the Freedom from Compulsory Fluoridation and Medication Act on the November ballot, worded so vaguely that officials feared it might ban basic health measures like purifying drinking water with chlorine. The American Cancer Society complained that reports fluoride caused cancer were baseless; the anger did not abate. One citizen pointed out that most water went toward "washing, baths, watering the lawn, etc. Yet our wonderful bureaucrats want to spend millions of dollars, raise water rates, and [raise] taxes for a 97.5 percent waste. I am not opposed to fluoride but I am opposed to waste, and this is waste of the worst kind."

In Michigan, a University of Chicago economist and former advisor to Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign was neck deep in a campaign he believed was more important than electing Gerald Ford. "Proposition C" was an initiative modeled on a failed campaign Governor Reagan had sponsored in California in 1973 to cap taxes and limit state spending. On October 13, the professor was out electioneering for it when a long-distance phone call came from Stockholm announcing that he had won the Nobel Prize in Economics. His name was Milton Friedman.

Stockholm's choice signified an intellectual earthquake. Friedman was perhaps the most right-wing economist working at a top American university. His popular 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom* argued, with breathtaking confidence, radical notions like that government should not regulate pharmaceuticals (unsafe drugs would be weeded out via the marketplace) and corporations must not make charitable contributions (their only legitimate function was making profit for shareholders). The next year, Friedman coauthored his academic magnum opus, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960*, which argued that government did not cure financial panics and depressions but caused them. Such ideas were so out of the mainstream that one economist compared him to a fencer attacking a battleship with a foil.

But "the bald little professor with the elfin face and the tart tongue," as a journalist described him, was also a relentless popularizer of those radical ideas. He had been writing a biweekly column in *Newsweek* magazine since 1966. For even longer, he spoke before just about any student audience that invited him—except at mandatory chapel services; those, he said, violated his ideal of liberty. His latest book, *There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch*, was neatly summarized by Ronald Reagan in a radio commentary congratulating Friedman for his prize: "Business does not and cannot pay taxes. Only people pay taxes . . . the money they forward to internal revenue comes from the corporations' employees, customers, and

stockholders. Politicians who advocate higher business taxes are really hiding the fact that they intend to raise the tax on all of us, as employees, consumers, and stockholders."

In Chicago, Friedman's wife and economist collaborator, Rose, told one inquiring reporter after another that since her husband considered Proposition C more important, he wouldn't be returning home for a press conference. She spoke on his behalf: "Milton is a conservative economist and the Swedish are quite left. . . . Your political leanings are as important for the prize as your achievement. Giving Milton the prize now is finally saying, 'He really isn't as bad as we thought he was.'"

As it happened, the Swedes chose not one but two American conservatives for Nobel Prizes that year. The other was Saul Bellow, whose novels cut the clichés of *bien-pensant* liberalism to ribbons, frequently in the voice of characters much like their creator—brooding, hyper-intellectual Jews who saw civilization collapsing around them as the unintended consequence of liberals' do-gooding schemes. He had also been a youthful Marxist. That made Bellow the pluperfect specimen of what had become known as "neoconservatism." A neoconservative, as their ex-Trotskyist godfather the *Wall Street Journal* columnist Irving Kristol defined it, was a "liberal mugged by reality." That perfectly described the protagonist of Bellow's 1970 masterpiece, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. "Mr. Sammler," Bellow wrote, "was testy with White Protestant America for not keeping better order. Cowardly surrender. Not a strong ruling class. Eager in a secret humiliating way, to come down and mingle with all the minority mobs, and scream against themselves."

And now Bellow and Friedman had won the prize Alfred Nobel had established to honor "those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind"—quite the rebuke to those like the *Boston Globe* columnist who wrote, a few months later, that, given its domination by conservatives, the GOP was "not in the twentieth century yet."

On TV, five days after Milton Friedman's prize was announced, Norman Lear, the producer of *All in the Family*, debuted a situation comedy called *All's Fair* starring Richard Crenna as a conservative newspaper columnist and Bernadette Peters as his liberal girlfriend, with Irving Kristol as a consultant and a young conservative named Ben Stein as a writer. ("Here's our resident fascist!" the warm-up comedian would introduce him at the live tapings.) The next week, in Utah, Ronald Reagan, on the same day Ford tried and failed to persuade him to campaign with him in California, began a two-day swing for Orrin Hatch before delirious crowds shouting for the sixty-five-year-old to run for president again.

Richard Viguerie made a rare appearance in the news. The National

Committee for an Effective Congress, a distinguished liberal D.C. institution cofounded by Eleanor Roosevelt, filed a complaint with the Federal Elections Commission against four New Right groups—two of which had little formal existence beyond incorporation papers filed by a Viguerie deputy. The four groups, the complaint charged, had funneled $7,500 to a conservative congressional candidate from Pittsburgh named Robert J. Casey—an illegal contribution from a corporation, allegedly: the Richard A. Viguerie Company. Casey protested his innocence, credibly: he had used Viguerie to fundraise for his primary, then fired him—"frankly because his prices were too high." Viguerie protested his innocence, less convincingly. He termed the director of the National Committee for an Effective Congress "the godfather of the New Left," whining, "This is a two-way thing. They started it before we did." (The Federal Elections Commission made a preliminary finding that "a violation has occurred," then decided they didn't have the resources to commit to a prosecution.)

And in Utah, Viguerie's fundraising helped the underdog charge into the home stretch with a flurry of TV commercials branding his opponent a gun-grabbing, death-penalty-opposing "Eastern Seaboard liberal"; and Orrin Hatch won his senate seat with a comfortable margin—on the same ballot on which Utahans elected to protect state water supplies from adulteration by fluoride.

So did Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The merry Harvard policy intellectual had beaten three of New York's most prominent liberals for the Democratic nomination for United States Senate. The former Johnson and Nixon administration official was best known as the author of a 1965 Labor Department report attributing most of Black America's woes not to racism but to its allegedly aberrant family structure. In Nixon's White House he recommended "benign neglect" of the nation's Black people. Under Gerald Ford, as America's representative to the United Nations, he became known for his hawkish exhortations against the Soviet Union and the upstart Third World. And now he would be seated as the Senate's first neoconservative.

AFTER ELECTION DAY, NEOCONSERVATISM SCORED ITS MAJOR VICTORY behind the scenes.

The formerly Marxist immigrant Jews at the forefront of the movement had trained rigorously for political warfare in the hothouse ideological environment of the Depression, most famously in furious debates in the alcoves of the cafeteria of the City University of New York. They came of age in the passionate belief that Communism was the inevitable wave of the future. They still suspected this—only now they dedicated

their lives to vanquishing it, for the survival of the West in the ongoing war for the world. Détente, they believed, was a fatal delusion. The ever-expanding cadres of quisling liberals within both parties, who refused to grasp that Communism was determined to conquer the world, were the Kremlin's objective allies.

They also still believed, as they had in their Marxist youth, that the most effective way to change history was to organize in subterranean cells, vanguardists guiding the hand of history by deploying the power of ideas. Thus did they burrow within the establishment to tutor Republican and Democratic politicians in these dire imperatives before it was too late.

Washington conventional wisdom had not been kind to them: it held that the world was "multipolar" and "interdependent," that rivalry between the Communist and capitalist worlds was no longer the central concern, that after the debacle in Vietnam the United States could no longer act as the world's policeman. David Rockefeller, president of Chase Manhattan Bank, established an organization called the Trilateral Commission in 1973 with the Polish-born strategic thinker Zbigniew Brzezinski to promote a new paradigm holding that such issues as terrorism, energy shortage, chaotic global financial flows, and environmental degradation were the problems of the future; that the Cold War framework of bipolar superpower rivalry no longer made much sense; and that North America, Western Europe, and Japan must devise institutions of cooperative—"trilateral"—responsibility to manage these new realities.

And when one of trilateralism's most dedicated converts, Jimmy Carter, won the presidency, and named Brzezinski as his national security advisor, the neocons girded their loins for war.

It began, naturally, underground. For years Gerald Ford's secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld had argued that the arms agreements his rival Henry Kissinger had negotiated with the Soviet Union were not worth the paper on which they were printed: the Soviets simply built any weapons they pleased. Rumsfeld's neoconservative deputy Paul Wolfowitz had convinced him that the CIA's annual intelligence estimate of the Soviet's capabilities was biased toward détente. So Rumsfeld lobbied the president to generate a competing assessment of the Soviet threat.

CIA director William Colby was not amused by the bureaucratic insult. But in the fall of 1975, Rumsfeld engineered a bureaucratic coup that removed him. The following spring, at the height of the primaries against Reagan, President Ford took Rumsfeld's advice, authorizing a panel of sixteen "outside experts" to review the highly classified data by which the annual National Intelligence Estimate was produced, to write a counter-estimate of its own. The group became known as "Team B." (Team A was the CIA itself.) Team B concluded just what Rumsfeld wished it to: first, that the Soviet Union could wipe out virtually America's entire nuclear capability in a first strike if it wanted to; and second, that the USSR *did* want to.

Team B included Wolfowitz, a neoconservative Harvard professor of Russian history named Richard Pipes, and Paul Nitze, a hard-line defense intellectual who had served five presidents. Nitze had authored a similar report in 1957 whose leaked conclusions made their way into the 1960 presidential campaign when John F. Kennedy accused the Eisenhower administration of allowing a catastrophic "missile gap" with the Soviet Union. The report was based on inaccurate Air Force intelligence claiming the Soviet Union possessed as many as a thousand intercontinental ballistic missiles when in fact they only had four, a reality that proved that the Soviets were *not* in fact pursuing global dominations. The hard-liners remained unchastened by their mistake—as they would be again and again following many more bias-driven errors.

Team B focused on a class of evidence on Soviet intentions the CIA considered inherently unreliable: the writings of Soviet military leaders, like the officer who argued in a 1963 book that a nuclear war could be fought and won by the Soviet Union. They took this as open-and-shut evidence of official Kremlin policy, no matter that, during this period, Soviets had never even *tried* to build enough ICBMs to attempt it.

Team B also believed, based on speculative deductions, that the Soviets were increasing their commitment to civil defense. They thus concluded that the Soviets did not believe in the stabilizing doctrine upon which America's nuclear system was built: "mutually assured destruction," which held that because each understood that the other could obliterate them many times over, and that thus nobody could truly "win," the best way to prevent war was to negotiate a parity of firepower. Instead, Team B argued, the Russians were preparing to ride out a nuclear holocaust they intended to start.

Their analysis was concluded in time for Jimmy Carter's election. Then they leaked it to the press—in advance of the CIA's official National Intelligence Estimate, which would now look conspicuously weak. Well-placed, well-timed leaks were the most powerful weapon in the neoconservatives' arsenal. This one exploded with a political force in the megatons. In a season of supposed right-wing obsolescence, all Washington was atwitter with debates over whether détente hadn't been a naïve, disastrous mistake, and whether America's weariness with its superpower status, which neoconservatives called "Vietnam Syndrome," was spurring unilateral disarmament.

"Vietnam Syndrome" was the coinage of neoconservative foreign policy's most prominent public face, Eugene Rostow, a law professor at Yale who had been an architect of the Vietnam War. In the fall of 1975, he had proposed forming a small bipartisan committee, with a membership so prominent it would be impossible to ignore, to warn the public that the Soviet peril was more dangerous than ever. Christened the Committee on the Present Danger, a tribute to a similar group formed in 1950 with that moniker, the committee was chartered in March of 1976; then, with the sedulousness of Dwight D. Eisenhower planning D-Day, Nitze took CPD underground, biding his time for a propitious moment to strike.

Nitze won a pre-inaugural meeting with the president-elect, lecturing him via a battery of charts and graphs about Team B's conclusions. Carter was unmoved. So the plotters publicly announced their new committee at an impassioned press conference. Cochairman Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO said, "Our country is in a period of danger, and the danger is increasing. Unless decisive steps are taken to alert the nation, and to change the course of its policy, our economic and military capability will become inadequate to assure security." Others said the Soviet Union's "unparalleled military buildup" was "reminiscent of Nazi Germany's rearmament in the 1930s," and that Russia, which "does not subscribe to American notions of nuclear sufficiency and mutually assured destruction," was building forces "designed to enable the USSR to fight, survive, and win a nuclear war." Such language soon dominated security discussions in Washington.

"Carter to Inherit Intense Dispute on Soviet Intentions," the *Washington Post* front page trumpeted a little more than a fortnight before the inauguration, next to a picture of the incoming president looking meek in his plaid flannel shirt. A mainstream arms control expert protested that "there is a major effort underway to recreate the atmosphere of the 'missile gap' days of 1960." A liberal Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee called it "at least 75 percent bull." Senator Charles Percy, however, a bellwether centrist, said *he* was convinced: the Soviets were "seeking superiority."

The neocons' intention had been to establish a climate of opinion on the ground that would be very hard to reverse once a new president's team was in place. It was working. Jimmy Carter wasn't even inaugurated yet and his intention to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons was already on the rocks.

HOWARD PHILLIPS'S CONSERVATIVE CAUCUS MADE ITS PUBLIC DEBUT IN DEcember with a three-day convention in Chicago. The seven hundred delegates greeted Senator-elect Hatch as a conquering hero. A conservative Democratic congressman lamented that his party had been taken over by "out and out socialists." William Rusher said that Reagan "blew the chance" for a conservative victory in 1976 by sticking with the Republican Party.

Phillips promised "a guerrilla battle at the grass-roots level," suggested the creation of a national network of conservative newspapers, because "media is in the hand of the enemy," and announced the Conservative Caucus's intention to form a shadow cabinet. Congressman-elect Mickey Edwards noted the previous evening's episode of *All in the Family*, in which the show's resident reactionary gleefully predicted that Ronald Reagan would be elected president in 1980: "Archie Bunker, a Democrat, is one of us!"

Much more media light was trained on the annual meeting of the Republican National Committee, picking a new party chairman. Bob Dole repeated the post-defeat conventional wisdom: Republicans could not win by "proudly clinging to a narrow notion of ideological purity." Reagan, conversely, appeared on *60 Minutes* and said that "the Republican Party is dead, unless it stands up and erects a set of principles around which people can rally and say, 'This is what we stand for,'" and that if he had been his party's nominee, Jimmy Carter would have lost.

Reagan's preferred candidate to lead the RNC—Utah party chair Dick Richardson, the person who had convinced Orrin Hatch to run—was defeated. The meeting crackled with right-wing energy all the same. Senator Hugh Scott, the guest of honor, railed against the "rednecks of Georgia," who "cannot long conceal their real views from the scrutiny of the media," and mis-called the opposition the "Democrat" Party, a baiting right-wing slur associated with Joseph McCarthy—and Hugh Scott was known as a *liberal* Republican.

Former Tennessee senator William E. Brock III, heir to a local candy company fortune, won. The media called him a compromise pick, but he was also plenty conservative: he was an original member of the committee that had drafted Barry Goldwater to run for president, and had won a senate seat in 1970 by savaging incumbent Al Gore Sr. for supporting school integration and opposing prayer in schools. Reagan blessed the pick, conditionally: "Recently he expressed to me his belief that the principles of the 1976 platform are those which can knit together a new majority.... He has my full support in his efforts to broaden the party in this way." In other words, Ronald Reagan supported Brock—so long as he acted like Ronald Reagan. The meeting also elected an Arizonan as Brock's cochair: a Sun Belt sweep.

Republican senators met to choose their leadership—elevating many conservatives and booting several liberals. Orrin Hatch would head the Select Committee on Committees—an unprecedented honor for a new member. *Congressional Quarterly* labeled him "one of the most intriguing new figures in the Senate.... Conservative interest groups are already counting on him as a spokesman in the 95th Congress, and some are even talking about him as a possible presidential candidate."

Word leaked that Jimmy Carter intended to pick JFK speechwriter Theodore Sorensen to head the CIA, with a mandate to reform the agency. Sorensen had been a conscientious objector during World War II. "What kind of insane asylum are we setting up here?" an unnamed intelligence official said to the press. Neoconservatives cunningly scotched the nomination, in part by intimating that Sorensen was complicit in Kennedy-era assassination plots against foreign leaders (even though neoconservatives *opposed* the reforms that banned such activities). Sorensen withdrew three days before the inauguration, saying "a substantial portion of the United States Senate and the intelligence community is not yet ready to accept... an outsider who believes as I believe." Carter praised the act as "characteristically generous and unselfish." Sorensen snapped back publicly: "Some say that Carter helped put the noose around my neck but that is not true. He helped kick the chair from underneath." It was a harbinger of bitterness to come.

The capital's foreign policy mood wrenched right. The *New York Times* reported that the CIA was revising their National Intelligence Estimate, to be placed on the new president's desk on his first day in office, in a more hawkish direction: "Team B (Hardline) Appears to Be More Influential Than Team A." Pollsters found Americans "significantly more sympathetic toward all military and defense spending": only 20 percent wanted the Pentagon's budget to be reduced, compared to 37 percent in 1972. A survey of listees in *Who's Who Among American High School Students* found 77 percent favored such an increase—and 39 percent wanted America to send troops if a Communist nation was involved in a Third World conflict.

Jimmy Carter was inaugurated on January 20. A black-tie-optional "Ball for the Unrepresented Conservative Majority" was held across the river in Arlington. Two days later, with Pennsylvania Avenue hardly swept clean from Jimmy Carter's inaugural parade, another stepped off: the annual "March for Life" mourning the Supreme Court's January 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. In previous years hardly more than a handful participated. This time, police counted forty thousand, despite temperatures in the single digits. Newly sworn-in congressman Bob Dornan—elected with the help of $65,000 raised by Richard Viguerie—said this was far more significant than Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 March on Washington: "The civil rights issue here is the difference between restricting the movement of free people and the slaughter of innocent people." Senator Hatch said federal subsidies for abortions made it "possible for genocidal programs as were practiced in Nazi Germany." *National Right to Life News* reported that when the march reached its terminus at the Capitol, "the crowd of chilled pro-lifers didn't want to go home." So they carted their placards inside—"PICK ON SOMEBODY YOUR OWN SIZE" (said a fetus in the womb, stern-faced, arms crossed); "AUSCHWITZ, DACHAU, AND MARGARET SANGER"; "WE WANT LIFE NOT DEATH"—for impromptu citizen lobbying.

Thus did 1977 begin for the conservatives. Spiritual warriors; ex-Trotskyist bureaucratic guerrillas; Nobel Prize–winning economists and novelists; congressmen and senators armed with state-of-the art computers and a determination to make liberalism obsolete—objectively speaking, a promising emergent coalition. Even if, heading into Jimmy Carter's first term, most people hardly knew it existed.

CHAPTER 3

"Hi, Jimmy!"

THE *WASHINGTON POST*'S PULITZER PRIZE–WINNING COMMENTATOR DAVID Broder offered a brooding reflection the morning of Jimmy Carter's inauguration: "Of the four presidents who have served since Dwight Eisenhower went peaceably into retirement, one was assassinated, one was rejected by his party, one was forced to resign and one was defeated for reelection."

He could have piled on further, non-presidential, traumas: a savage war that America lost; race riots; the assassinations of heroes like Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, and Malcolm X; a polarizing youth rebellion that saw the generations lining each other up in their figurative sights as if preparing for an actual civil war—like the high school student who wrote, "The pigs' schools will be destroyed unless they serve the people," in an essay published in a widely read 1970 anthology, or, that same year, the popular movie *Joe*, in which a father shot his hippie daughter in the back.

1970 was also the year in which John Lennon and Yoko Ono had erected billboards around the country reading "WAR IS OVER IF YOU WANT IT." Subsequently, Richard Nixon worked to hound them out of the country as dangerous subversives. Now, however, here they were in Washington on Jimmy Carter's day—"looking," a reporter observed, for all the world "like a staid middle-aged married couple."

The civil war of the 1960s was over if you wanted it.

The day broke crisp and clear, after weeks of record blizzards—just as on John F. Kennedy's day. Other years, inaugural box seats had cost in the hundreds of dollars. This time they went for $25—and high officials had to pay for tickets, too.

Carter entered in an ordinary business suit he had bought off the rack, instead of the customary formal wear. Chief Justice Warren Burger administered the oath of office, then announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States." A roar issued forth from the assembled multitudes. Then, over an open microphone, a child's voice rang out: "*Hi, Jimmy!*"

That was just the kind of day it was—the kind of week. Monuments stayed open until midnight. Tourist buses drove past Amy Carter's new elementary school—an integrated public school. The "world's largest square dance" was held. An early morning People's Prayer Service for more than five thousand worshippers was hosted by the Southern Baptists on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, in twenty-five-degree cold. Nearly half the residents of Plains, Georgia, arrived in a chartered Amtrak train, in newly purchased thermal underwear. There was a special showing of *Yankee Doodle Dandy* starring James Cagney, and fireworks in Carter's campaign colors of green and white.

At the podium before the Capitol, Jimmy paused to etch the mood into history. Then he spoke:

"For myself, and for our nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land."

He reached down and shook Gerald Ford's hand: a healing act in itself.

The family Bible he had sworn his oath upon was opened to a verse from the prophet Micah: "What doth our Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Humility was his theme. He spoke of our "recent mistakes," told Americans "your strength can compensate for my weakness," noted "that even our great nation has its recognized limits, and that we can neither answer all questions nor solve all problems. . . . We must simply do our best."

He asked for "fresh faith in an old dream." He nodded to Watergate, promising that "where there had been distrust" he would seek to restore "respect for the law and equal treatment under the law," so as to enable "our people to be proud of their own government again." This was met by an enthusiastic gust of applause. Another elephant in the room—Vietnam—was acknowledged with an avowal that America's strength would remain "so sufficient that it need not be proven in combat: a quiet strength." This time he had to stop for a standing ovation.

It came as a surprise; that hadn't been written as an applause line. He got similar bursts when he said our "ultimate goal" was "the elimination of all nuclear weapons from this earth," for the three times he promoted human rights as a foundation of America's foreign policy—and for his soaring concluding affirmation of "our belief in an undiminished, ever-expanding American dream."

It ended an unpretentious fifteen minutes after it began. The Carter family settled into a solar-heated reviewing stand in front of the White House—"symbolizing humility, closeness to the people, concern for the ecology," said the Georgia Tech engineer who designed it. The parade stepped off. Then, startlingly, the presidential limousine stopped moving. On TV you could hear loud cries from the crowd: *What emergency was this?*

They were cries of delight. The president, the first lady, and Amy stepped out and strode hand in hand down the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue. This was unprecedented. During the last inaugural parade, protesters had burned American flags and thrown wine jugs at Richard Nixon's armored limousine. A joyous chatter worked its way back through the rows of spectators, who started sprinting alongside, straining for a view, Jimmy and Rosalynn smiling and waving, nine-year-old Amy striking silly faces, as the first family walked the route of JFK's funeral cortege in reverse, as if unwinding the traumas of the 1960s altogether.

THE "PEOPLE'S INAUGURAL," THE PLANNERS DUBBED IT. *NEWSWEEK* CALLED it the "Denim Inaugural." The Washington establishment proved underwhelmed.

The night before, there had been a "New Spirit Inaugural Concert" at the Kennedy Center, featuring everyone from John Wayne to Johnny Cash to Aretha Franklin and the National Symphony. Dan Aykroyd of *Saturday Night Live* performed his Jimmy Carter impression ("*Ah* promise to be a *lusty* president"), which was when the guest of honor entered—laughing. He took his seat in the President's Box in the first balcony, shared a secret with Amy, who giggled (the picture made the front pages), led a standing ovation for Loretta Lynn, then for the poet James Dickey, who called Carter a "mythic hero." He received another "Hi, Jimmy!" when he stood up to leave after the performance. Carter replied by reaching down as if to touch that citizen's hand. Sally Quinn, the wife of *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, daughter of one of Washington's most distinguished generals, all-but-uncrowned queen of Washington society, singled out that moment in her sour review in the *Post*: "There was no royal feeling."

Another citizen, stuck back in the fourth balcony, was even less pleased. That would be House speaker Tip O'Neill, an old-fashioned, back-slapping pol of the sort Carter reviled. He had requested a block of seats for his entourage. He called Carter's thirty-one-year-old campaign manager, soon to become his chief White House advisor, to demand to know why they were in the last row. Hamilton Jordan cockily volunteered to refund his money. Replied O'Neill, "I'll ream your ass, you sonofabitch!"

Both Senator Eugene McCarthy and columnist Robert Novak called the Carter team the "Snopes clan"; the *Boston Globe*, "the cast of *Gone with the Wind*"; Elizabeth Drew of the *New Yorker*, "a tight little group, suspicious of outsiders, protective of its power"; the word "yokels" was frequently heard. The nickname that stuck was "Georgia Mafia."

There was Ham Jordan, who wore work boots to the White House, and had hardly had any other job in his adult life except looking after

Jimmy Carter. His "disdain for members of Congress, as well as most politicians besides Jimmy Carter is well known," the *Wall Street Journal* said. Stuart Eizenstat, the skinny, bookish Atlanta lawyer in charge of policy, was compared to a cloistered monk. The mysterious "Mr. Kirbo"—Charles Kirbo, the quiet Atlanta lawyer and power broker, said to be Carter's most trusted advisor—was staying behind in Georgia. Carter's designated chief congressional liaison, Frank Moore of Dahlonega, Georgia, was described by a member of the Democratic leadership, in the *Washington Post*, as "one of those good 'ol boys," "not too bright." The only one not from Georgia, Midge Costanza, was the former vice mayor of Rochester, New York, a salty feminist whose only evident qualification for a West Wing office next to the president's was supporting Jimmy Carter before anyone else. Then there was budget director Bertram Lance, said to be Carter's best friend, who had loaned him the money that helped Carter beat one Washington insider after another for the presidential nomination. Identified in the press as a "country banker," he looked like one of those Southern courthouse bosses, the bad guys on TV news during the civil rights era. "What has been Mr. Lance's experience in the federal government?" asked Senator William Proxmire, whose banking committee was tasked with confirming him. "He has none—zero, zip, zilch, not one year, not even one week, not one day."

Thirty thousand invitations, in brown ink, on recycled paper, had gone out for the official inaugural "parties" (they used to call them balls), and one of them was reserved for eight hundred ordinary Americans in whose homes Jimmy Carter had stayed during the campaign. The *Post* reported—on the front page—that a Maryland man who had driven twenty-seven thousand miles in his own car campaigning for Carter since last February never received one. Though three Republicans in his town did, and a Louisiana man serving prison time, and the Reverend Jerry Falwell; but the staff volunteer in charge of rebutting Falwell's attacks on Carter had not, nor the president of the Norfolk and Western Railway—to a party he'd agreed to *host*.

How could this man run the federal government? He didn't even know whom not to snub.

WASHINGTON INSIDERS WERE LONELY IN THEIR COMPLAINTS. GALLUP found that 60 percent of Carter's countrymen, and 49 percent of those who had voted against him, thought more highly of him than they had on Election Day. The same percent believed he would reduce unemployment, 58 percent that he'd defeat inflation, 56 percent that he'd reduce the number of federal employees, more than three-quarters that he'd make the country more optimistic.

But the elites also had a point: you couldn't make Washington work only with outsiders. "The government is going to be run by people you have never heard of," Hamilton Jordan had boasted the previous summer, singling out two hoary fixtures of the defense establishment: "If, after the inauguration, you find a Cy Vance as secretary of state, and Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of national security, then I would say we failed. And I'd quit." Cy Vance was appointed secretary of state, Zbigniew Brzezinski national security advisor; Jordan did not quit—though even then the D.C. establishment criticized Carter for hiring "retreads." They criticized Carter for everything.

Came whispers that he might find a role in the administration for one of the most right-wing members of Gerald Ford's cabinet, William Simon, and name the anti-busing mayor of Pittsburgh to a Justice Department post. That enraged Washington liberals. Came news that he wanted the most liberal federal judge in the South, Frank Johnson, to head the FBI, and an antiwar activist, Sam Brown, to head the Peace Corps. That enraged Washington conservatives. Ralph Nader had first met Jimmy Carter in an Atlanta hotel room early in the primary season. He announced, back then: "Jimmy Carter is something special. . . . I've never met a politician quite like Carter, and I know a lot of them." Now he carped of his appointments, "There is not one who is not an old-line, money establishment corporate type." To Washington's permanent residents, their new neighbor couldn't win for losing.

THE DAY AFTER THE INAUGURAL, THE PRESIDENT'S REDNECK BROTHER Billy stepped out of a station wagon on F Street carrying a bottle of beer. Patrons poured out of the Old Ebbitt Grill for his autograph. He offered a review of the Kennedy Center concert: "I believe Amy and I could have written a better show."

America had voted for change, and here it was. But what, precisely, would it mean?

The new president had been an engineer. He had also been a Baptist missionary. The engineer believed that with the right information, perseverance, and his clear, clever mind, he could conquer any complexity. To reform the United States tax code, he began reading it—all one thousand pages. An old Washington hand compared him to his Navy mentor, the nuclear submariner admiral Hyman G. Rickover: "He has to know how every single engine or pump works. Carter is the same way. He looks upon government as machinery to be improved." The Baptist reached decisions in the manner of a biblical prophet wandering in the wilderness—then announced them with a confidence as if they were chiseled on tablets. Where the two modes of being, engineer and preacher, converged was in their passionate certitude, beyond compromise. An unusual base of mental operations for a president. Especially so in the 1970s, when governing was more than ever a profession of irresolvable conundrums.

The first issue to which Carter turned was healing a gaping wound from the 1960s: what to do with young men who had evaded service in the Vietnam War. Carter studied the problem from all angles. Surely, he prayed on it, too. Then he announced a hairsplitting conclusion, alien to both the dictionary and legal precedent, that while he opposed "amnesty" because it means "that what you did was right," he would "pardon" draft evaders, and would consider upgrading the discharges of approximately eight hundred thousand veterans from general to honorable, but would not review dishonorable or less-than-honorable discharges or penalties for desertion. An executive order to that effect was his first official act as president.

Barry Goldwater called it "the most disgraceful thing a president has ever done"; RNC chairman Bill Brock said it was "a slap in the face to all Americans and families who did their duty"; Governor Meldrim Thomson of New Hampshire ordered American flags in his state to fly at half-staff. The left was no less outraged. Vietnam Veterans Against the War pointed out that the deserters Carter's formula left in the cold were frequently from poor minorities, that the upgrading of general discharges stank of nepotism—for his own son had received a general discharge from the Navy for smoking marijuana. Congress passed a bipartisan amendment barring funds to implement the order. By summer, the Justice Department reported that hardly more than 10 percent of draft refugees had taken up the president's invitation to return to the United States.

The new president had managed to enrage potential allies from every point on the spectrum on his very first day.

HIS NEXT FOCUS WAS THE ECONOMY. CARTER INHERITED AN INFLATION rate of 5.8 percent, down from double digits a couple of years earlier. But the unemployment rate was an unacceptable 7.8 percent. On January 22, he proposed a stimulus package that would double public works spending and send a $50 rebate to every taxpayer. The rebate had been cooked up by the president-elect's technocrats as the quickest way to prime the economic pump. Carter sprang the unconventional notion on the Democratic congressional leadership only a few days before announcing it. The members most crucial to the fiscal success of the new administration—Russell Long of Louisiana, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said to know the tax code as thoroughly as the Pope knew the Lord's Prayer; Edmund Muskie, chair of the Senate Budget Committee; House Ways and Means chairman Al Ullman; Tip O'Neill—all thought it ridiculous. But

eager to accommodate the first member of their party to occupy the White House since 1969, they kept their beefs quiet.

Then there was energy. Until 1973, except during World War II, there really was no conception of energy as something susceptible to "shortages." The energy crisis that followed the embargo imposed that year on the U.S. by Arab members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to punish America's support of Israel in its war against Egypt had been a cataclysm while it lasted—but seemed to end almost as soon as it began. Subsequently, the price of petroleum in real dollars actually fell. Americans—including many senators—decided the crisis had been a temporary inconvenience staged by greedy oil companies. But when Jimmy Carter, following his election, donned his engineer's hat to study the problems he would inherit on January 20, he concluded that America *still* faced a dire energy crisis that required dramatic, immediate action.

That posed a political problem. As a ten-thousand-word "Initial Working Paper on Political Strategy" that Pat Caddell had sent Carter in December explained, trust in the government was at an all-time low. The White House "can promulgate energy regulations, can ask the people to conserve, but as long as the public refuses to believe that there is an energy crisis, they are unwilling to follow."

So the president endeavored to convince them that there was.

On February 2, he sat down in an austere wooden chair in the White House library, in a mustard-colored cardigan sweater. Behind the president, flames crackled: a fireside chat, just like Franklin Roosevelt used to do. Though FDR hadn't preempted *Charlie's Angels*.

"Good evening," Carter began. "Tomorrow will be two weeks since I became President. I have spent a lot of time deciding how I can be a good president. This talk, which the broadcast networks have agreed to bring to you, is one of several steps that I will take to keep in close touch with the people of our country, and to let you know informally about our plans for the coming months." The most urgent was "to develop a national energy policy."

He started with the energy problem the American people *did* know about: a shortage on home heating oil and natural gas in the Northeast during the record-cold winter. "But the real problem—our failure to plan for the future or to take energy conservation seriously—started long before this winter, and it will take much longer to solve": it was, in fact, "permanent." Carter said that his special assistant for energy—Gerald Ford's defense secretary, James Schlesinger—was devising a complete national energy program that he would present to Congress on April 20, ninety days later, and that he soon would be asking Congress for a new cabinet-level Department of Energy "to bring order out of chaos."

(This was news to Congress.)

He promised "'town hall' meetings across the nation, where you can criticize, make suggestions, and ask questions," and radio call-in sessions "during which I can accept your phone calls and answer the questions that are on your mind."

And he ran through a laundry list of policy goals: laws to prevent strip mining and oil tanker spills; measures to fight inflation, unemployment, urban decay, and welfare fraud. He promised to start his plan to reorganize a "confused and wasteful" government "at the top—in the White House," with a one-third reduction in staff. He announced "a ceiling on the number of people employed by federal government agencies."

This was Carter the engineer.

Then came the Baptist minister, preaching from the Book of Caddell.

"If we all cooperate and make modest sacrifices"—he used that word, "sacrifice," six times—"if we learn to live thriftily and remember the importance of helping our neighbors then we can find ways to adjust and to make our society more efficient and our own lives more enjoyable and productive." He noted, "Because of the division in our country, many of us cannot remember a time when we really felt united. . . . During World War II we faced a terrible crisis—but the challenge of fighting Nazism drew us together. Those of us old enough to remember know that they were dark and frightening times—but many of our memories are of people ready to help each other for the common good. I believe that we are ready for that same spirit again."

Carter then implored Americans to lower their thermostats to 65 degrees during the day, 55 at night. He concluded, "If we are a united nation, then I can be a good president. But I will need your help to do it. I will do my best. I know you will do yours."

With the public, the address was a hit. But the legislators over whose heads the president was speaking lashed back. The next day, in a Senate Budget Committee hearing, Fritz Hollings lampooned Carter: "While he's asking us for sacrifice, his team is up here asking us to give everyone fifty bucks!"

Such stirrings from within a president's own party during the hundred-day honeymoon presidents traditionally enjoyed were unprecedented. They came at a time when Carter needed Democratic senators' help desperately. For, thanks to the neoconservatives, another key appointment was on the rocks.

PAUL WARNKE WAS A DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN DIPLOMAT AND DEFENSE intellectual who had served under presidents since Eisenhower. He was the highest-ranking Pentagon official to openly question the war in Vietnam, then served as chief foreign policy advisor in George McGovern's presidential campaign. In provocative articles in defense journals, he advocated bold moves by the U.S. to spur reciprocal actions from the Soviets to reduce nuclear arms.

Henry "Scoop" Jackson was the plodding, brilliant, and indefatigable fifth-term Democratic senator from Washington State. Jackson was quite liberal on some issues: running for president in 1972 he called for a federal jobs program; running in 1976 he called for breaking up big oil companies. But he was *very* conservative on defense. After Jimmy Carter named Warnke as chief negotiator for a new strategic arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union, Jackson became determined to block his confirmation. Jackson was the Capitol Hill patron of the neoconservative defense intellectuals—bereft that, of the fifty-three names they had put forward for jobs in the new administration, only one was hired (as special negotiator for Micronesia). Paul Nitze was particularly perturbed; he had wanted Warnke's job for himself.

Roland Evans and Robert Novak's "Inside Report" was published in hundreds of newspapers and was perhaps Washington's most influential column. On the morning of Carter's fireside chat, Evans and Novak said, "Critics of Warnke see a distinct possibility that the Carter administration will experiment with unilateral reduction of the American nuclear deterrent," so his confirmation "could conceivably snowball into a major fight." Robert Novak, as it happened, was also a favorite conduit for neoconservative leaks. No Senate had ever rejected a cabinet-level appointment so early in a new presidency, let alone a Senate controlled by the president's party. Scoop's minions were determined to make history.

Nitze testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Warnke's ideas were "demonstrably unsound," "asinine," "a screwball, arbitrary, fictitious kind of viewpoint that is not going to help the security of the country."

Senator Thomas McIntyre of New Hampshire, a liberal Democrat, replied:

"Do you think you are a better American than he is?"

"I really do."

On February 7, Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, the majority leader, shocked everyone by announcing that he was keeping an "open mind" on Warnke, because "many senators think he is too soft to negotiate with the Soviet Union." Howard Baker of Tennessee, the minority leader and a Republican moderate, echoed Byrd. The two leaders' willingness to publicize such doubts meant the nomination was hanging by a thread.

At the president's first press conference reporters suspiciously well informed on the fine points of nuclear diplomacy peppered him with questions about Warnke's fitness. Evans and Novak's third column on the fight in as many weeks pointed up contradictions between Warnke's previous, liberal arguments and the more conservative things he was saying now. Then, before the Armed Services Committee, Warnke was grilled on writings like a 1975 article in which he described the nuclear arms race as a folie à deux that left both sides less secure. The U.S., he had written, could "be the first off the treadmill." The committee's hostile questions had been cued up from an anonymous memo composed by a Jackson protégé named Richard Perle that had artfully distorted Warnke's arguments. Warnke was rocked on his heels—and then, under questioning from Scoop Jackson, was knocked nearly flat on his back. Jackson ticked off thirteen separate weapons systems and upgrades, then demanded Warnke confirm under oath that he had opposed them. Warnke, to prove he was strong, replied that he had reversed many of those earlier views—which made him sound weak.

The New Right joined in: Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie engineered a deluge of sixty thousand anti-Warnke letters to senators. Warnke was confirmed as chief negotiator on March 9 by a shockingly slim margin of 58–40. "I don't think there were twenty-five votes against him three weeks ago," Scoop Jackson boasted.

Warnke's job would be negotiating treaties that required two-thirds of the Senate to pass. Fifty-eight was nine votes shy of that. The Soviets surely received that message about President Carter's weak negotiating position loud and clear.

CAPITOL HILL WAS EVEN ANGRIER WITH THE PRESIDENT ABOUT THEIR DAMS. In the middle of February word spread that the Engineer in Chief had gotten ahold of the Army Corps of Engineers' General Plan, studied it from cover to cover, then devised a "hit list" of dozens of federal water projects to eliminate. And if your interest was sensible stewardship of the nation's finite natural and financial resources, many of his decisions seemed sound. Wrote a historian of America's failed water policies, "One of the projects would return five cents in economic benefits for every taxpayer dollar invested; one offered irrigation farmers subsidies worth one million dollars each; another, a huge dam on a middling California river, would cost more than Hoover, Shasta, Glen Canyon, Bonneville, and Grand Coulee combined."

But what looked like an inexplicable boondoggle to an engineer often looked like a matter of life and death for the congressmen in whose districts those projects sat.

On February 18, the White House began informing Congress of eighty projects Carter intended to cancel. He hadn't consulted his interior secretary, who was humiliated to learn about that plan while stepping off a plane in Denver for a conference of Western governors—who were livid. Congressman Mo Udall of Arizona said that if Carter went ahead and canceled his dams, "Tucson and Phoenix are going to dry up and blow away." Enraged legislators threatened to hold Carter's priorities hostage. Carter's $50 tax rebate hemorrhaged votes, barely surviving a March 10 vote in the Senate Finance Committee.

Came the social event of the season, the annual Gridiron Club dinner when one-half of official Washington put on silly costumes to lampoon the other half. The curtain rose on a phalanx of Carterites, garment bags over their shoulders, singing, to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia," "*Repent, repent, you Yankees don't forget / We won, we won, you ain't seen nothing yet / We give all the orders now, and you'll like what you get.*" Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, dead broke, showed up at the White House, begging for a job; "Billy Carter" gave them a $50 tax rebate instead. A ragged remnant of Republicans nursed their battle wounds and plotted their comeback over golf in President Ford's new hometown, Palm Springs. A jokester playing Senator Ed Brooke, the only Black Republican in Congress, reminded one playing Ronald Reagan that the GOP was doomed without Black support. "I guess you're right," Reagan replied. "The party needs you, and I need you. Now gimme my driver, pick up my bag, and let's get on with it." From the podium, the real Howard Baker said the president had originally wanted to appoint his brother head of the CIA, but Billy hadn't wanted to be in charge of anything he couldn't spell.

All in good fun. Except, this year, the contempt was real. The biggest project on the hit list was a $900 million artificial waterway in the Red River basin in Louisiana, home of Russell Long—who promptly announced his willingness to take Carter's legislative priorities hostage. House majority leader Jim Wright of Texas wrote his colleagues to rally them to "help defend the Constitutional prerogatives of Congress." Robert Byrd, in whose home state of West Virginia a dam collapse had recently killed sixty people, roared: "A project is not 'pork barrel' to someone who . . . sees his home swept away." After meeting with the president on water projects in his state, Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada told his close friend Ronald Reagan to leave his options open for 1980: "My gut tells me that I've just met with a one-termer."

Chastened, Carter pared the hit list to eighteen. Byrd was not appeased: on April 5 he said he'd kill the $50 rebate unless further compromise was forthcoming. Carter replied that the rebate was absolutely imperative, with his labor secretary insisting it would be impossible to get the unemployment rate below 7 percent that year without it.

Then, a week later, on the eighty-sixth day of his presidency, Carter began his fifth news conference with the announcement that since the economy had grown at nearly double the rate in January, February, and March as the previous quarter, he was canceling the rebate.

Senator Edmund Muskie had spent months twisting senators' arms and massaging the public for an idea he thought foolish. "What kind of fucking fiscal policy is this, Charlie?" he now raged to the chairman of Carter's Council of Economic Advisors, Charles Schultze. "Should we propose stimulus during the slowdown, oppose it when Christmas sales turn up, propose it again when the severe winter descends, and once again oppose it when spring raises the temperature and our spirits?"

You had to wonder: the next time Jimmy Carter asked congressional leaders to carry the ball on a controversial issue, how could they know he wouldn't leave them high and dry again?

HE STILL ENJOYED A HONEYMOON WITH THE PUBLIC, WHICH STILL MYSTIfied the establishment. Columnist Mary McGrory compared his popularity to that of Detroit Tigers pitcher Mark "the Bird" Fidrych, who'd become a fan favorite for his charmingly oddball rituals on the mound: "He talks to the ball as lovingly and intimately as Jimmy Carter talks to the American people."

People loved the way Carter forced cabinet members to give up chauffeured limousines, and tried to sell the presidential yacht, *Sequoia*, to save $800,000 in upkeep. How he and Rosalyn showed up unannounced three days after the inaugural to attend Sunday school at the First Baptist Church of Washington, and how he ordered that White House functions end at midnight to save staff overtime pay—with no hard liquor served. They loved his visit to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, where he lectured employees "who live in sin" to get married and "those of you who don't know your children's names, get to know them"; and Amy's White House tree house; and the sleepover party she hosted with her best pal from school, the daughter of a cook at the Chilean embassy; and her baptism by total immersion alongside the teenage daughter of an employee at the Liberian embassy.

And they loved *Ask President Carter*, during which, on Saturday afternoon, March 5, any American anywhere could ring him up to ask any question, live on the radio. Hosted by CBS News's beloved anchorman Walter Cronkite, Carter fielded forty-four calls from thirty-two states over two hours. Mike McGrath of Warsaw, Indiana, asked a question with four follow-ups about his taxes. ("If I can't find the answer before we go off the air, I will call Mike personally and give him the answer, if I can," the president promised.) A thirteen-year-old suggested shipping snow to the West to help with their drought. A Mrs. Phyllis Rogers of Albuquerque asked if it might "be possible to eliminate the word 'drug' from drug store advertising" to discourage drug abuse, which the president said he thought was a splendid idea. (*Saturday Night Live* did an affectionate lampoon. One frightened caller was suffering a bad LSD trip. The president calmly talked him down: "You did some Orange Sunshine, Peter. . . . Do you have any Allman Brothers? . . .")

He held his first town meeting, in Clinton, Massachusetts. And allowed four NBC camera crews to spend an entire day in the White House, with portable microphones clipped to his and his staffers' ties, affording NBC nearly carte blanche to choose clips for their *A Day with the President* documentary. One of the few moments the White House censored was a private meeting between Carter and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, in town for a state dinner—but not the one right before, when Carter inquired whether Sadat might like to visit the restroom.

All were huge hits—and he even began breaking through, for the nonce, with the Washington insiders. Judged David Broder, "He has transformed himself from the very shaky winner of a campaign into a very popular president whose mastery of the mass media has given him real leverage with which to govern."

That was the idea. Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*, the first comic strip to win a Pulitzer Prize, featured an acerbic series of cartoons starring a suave blue-jean-clad operator named Duane Delacourt who ran the White House's "Office of Symbolism." ("Yeah, Jennifer, on the next fireside chat . . . I'd like to try a leisure suit on the boss.") The fictional Carter so appreciated his work he elevated Delacourt to cabinet status. ("Okay by me. I don't have to take a pay raise, do I?" "Heck, no! In fact, I'm sure you've got a cut coming to you.") Funny, but serious: symbols mattered. They determined, press secretary Jody Powell believed, "the single most crucial aspect for any president": the public's degree of trust in him. And it worked. "The percentage of those who have placed their trust in Jimmy Carter has streaked from the 51 percent who voted for him into the seventies and eighties," the *Post* announced. The respect even extended to Clark Clifford, a towering figure in the Washington establishment going back to Harry Truman's presidency—just the sort of person Carterites disdained. He hymned "a return of the confidence of the people in our government."

Now, the White House sought to spend some of that political capital to persuade the public that there was an energy crisis, and to propose bold action to fix it.

On April 18, Carter gave a televised speech from the Oval Office setting forth the massive bet upon which he intended to stake the success of his presidency: comprehensive energy legislation. A replica of Harry Truman's famous desk plate—"THE BUCK STOPS HERE"—sat in front of him as he intoned, "Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem unprecedented in our history. With the exception of war, this is the biggest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes. The energy crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly.... Our decision about energy will test the character of the American people and the ability of the president and the Congress to govern this nation. This difficult effort will be the moral equivalent of war, except that we will be uniting our efforts to build and not to destroy."

In-house, they called it the "sky is falling" speech. The purpose was to light a fire under an audience of 535—whom he addressed directly two nights later in his first speech to a joint session of Congress—the first time in his fifty-two years Jimmy Carter had set foot on the floor of that body. Engineer-like, he presented a complicated menu of proposals that he and James Schlesinger had devised, almost entirely in secret, without input even from White House staff. Two days after that came a televised press conference, his second in a week.

The president was on TV four out of six days, a veritable miniseries—way too much, the establishment now decided.

The *Boston Globe* lectured that this was "Jimmy Carter leading the television industry by the nose," called his popularity "abnormally high," and said TV had "all too readily acquiesced in the construction of that popularity." William Safire of the *New York Times* found NBC's documentary reminiscent of China's recent worshipful state funeral of Chairman Mao. Capitol Hill jokers coined the mocking acronym "MEOW" for Carter's "moral equivalent of war" formulation: as if tinkering with natural gas subsidies, researching synthetic fuels, and lowering thermostats somehow compared to the global crusade that defeated Tojo and Hitler.

Again, the public disagreed. His approval ratings ranged from 69 percent to 80 percent; Gallup had Congress at 36 percent. As for how many of the American people agreed with the president that the energy crisis was serious, that stood at 86 percent. "A rash of books about new presidents has become a well-established tradition" the Cox newspaper syndicate noted. "But publishing experts say that Jimmy Carter is inspiring a record glut"—like *A Cookbook of Carter Family Favorites*, starring hush puppies, fried fish, and grits.

BUT PUBLIC FASCINATION COULD CUT BOTH WAYS: LIVE BY THE SYMBOL, DIE by the symbol. His image-makers had managed to hoist him on a high pedestal indeed—a dangerous height from which to fall.

Some auguries:

On the ninety-ninth day of his term, the *New York Times* highlighted

worrying quotes from unnamed aides that Carter was "brutal" and "intimidating" to his staff and refused to delegate, so immersing himself in detail that he had trouble making decisions.

Ham Jordan's reckless disdain for ordinary political alliances was becoming more and more troublesome, his Butch-Cassidy-and-the-Sundance-Kid pairing with Jody Powell progressively less charming. Like the time Powell was asked by a female reporter about rumors his friend didn't wear underwear. He replied that she would be the last to know. They were unrepentant: "stepping on toes and alienating groups of people" was just part of the job, Jordan said.

Another festering problem was Carter's radically impolitic ambassador to the United Nations. Andrew Young was a Black former Georgia congressman and civil rights movement hero. He had recently said that England "almost invented racism," and that Cuban troops stationed in the African nation of Angola had brought "a certain stability and order." He apologized to the British ambassador—then stepped in it even worse on the subject of Cuban troops, averring that Americans should not "get all paranoid over a few Communists, or even a few thousand Communists." Carter, personally close to Young and grateful to him as one of his most prominent Black surrogates during the campaign, got his old friend's back: "I do agree with it. It obviously stabilized the situation." Retorted a Republican congressman from North Carolina, "They stabilize you upside the head."

Here was a new discontent to organize. Richard Viguerie compiled an "'Andrew Young Must Go' Action Kit," distributed to the two hundred thousand addresses on the Conservative Caucus's national list. It included a vitriolic letter signed by Meldrim Thomson bearing the New Hampshire governor's official seal of office, a photograph of a child being burned to death, and a "handwritten" explanation composed to make it sound like this "wanton act of violence by black power terrorists," with whom "Andrew Young has long sided," had not taken place in Africa, but—well, just maybe in a town near you.